PLAYSTATION next3

100% unofficial PlayStation 3 magazine

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CHAOS EXCITEMENT AND PAIN-INDUCING PLEASURE

CRUSTY DEMONS

Out October 2006

PlayStation.2

DEEPSILVER

REDMILE ENTERTAINMENT

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The next-generation PlayStation magazine

We are next3

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PLAYSTATION 3

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EVERY NEW GAME

NEWS & FEATURES, PS3 MULTIMEDIA, NETWORKING, INTERVIEWS & MORE!

Next3 is the UK's only 100% dedicated PlayStation 3 magazine

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Editor's Letter

So have you seen the latest Playstation 3 ad? It's not been made for broadcast on TV but is readily available for viewing on the European Playstation 3 website. We've also included it on this month's disc. I suggest you check it out.

Love it, loathe it or feel nothing at all toward it, it's interesting nonetheless, simply because it addresses a challenging (at least to console manufacturers) issue: how to persuade people that the next generation of PlayStation is worth upgrading to.

In it, for those of you who haven't seen it, an intelligent, authoritative female voice explains how advanced AI will make gaming better: a boxer first training against inanimate punch bags and then sparring with a human partner cleverly illustrates the difference between PS2 and PS3 AI. The ad then goes on to show some snazzy in-game footage of *Resistance: Fall Of Man*.

This is just the first in a series of ads explaining very simply how Playstation 3's technology will make gaming better.

The campaign is stylish, simple and refreshing. Microsoft's approach for Xbox 360, on the other hand, has been pretty old-fashioned so far. Its latest, the 'person eating crisps while playing *Ghost Recon* on Xbox Live followed by a This Is The Next Generation tagline' ad, is naïve.

The next generation of gaming is about the new, about experiencing things that you haven't experienced before. The ability to annoy your friends online by eating crisps is not one of them.

Enjoy the issue.

Your team on next3

Bringing you the best advice from the experts

Keith Hennessey

At the recent *Pro Evo* Media Cup (held at Arsenal's Emirates Stadium) Keith's dreams finally came true. Not only did lifelong Hammers fan Hennessey get to see midfield dynamo (his words) Nigel Reo-Coker in the flesh but he also got his pic taken with *Eastenders*' Gus. Cesc Fabregas rudely pushed past him too. Now, that's what you call an evening of celebrity.

Thomas Leclerc

Tom also attended the said Media Cup event. He, however, didn't have such a great night. His highlight was getting 'bapped' 7-0 in the first round to some loser. Tom was so upset that he wandered off to find a chippy and nearly missed the bus back to Bournemouth. Still, we're sure that Gus would have put him up for the night. What a nice fella.

Craig Gilmore

Due to his lack of interest in 'socher', Craig did not attend the Media Cup. He did, quite ironically, spend the evening watching *Eastenders*. Even more ironic is the fact that he's the world's greatest Gus fan and owns all of Gus' albums and novels, a Gus bedspread and has even constructed a lifesize version of Gus made entirely of empty *Pro Evo* boxes. Now, how ironic is that?

next3

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PlayStation®2

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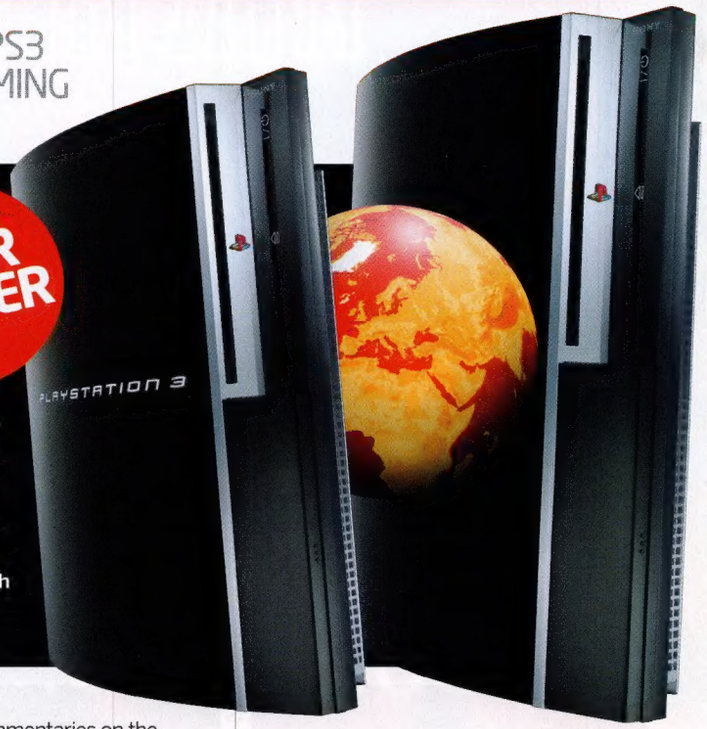
IF YOU WANT TO HAVE YOUR SAY ABOUT ANYTHING PS3 RELATED, ANYTHING NEXT3 RELATED, ANYTHING GAMING RELATED THEN WE NEED YOU TO GET WRITING...



Network works?

What's happening with Sony's online service? One minute we're told that it will be a genuine competitor to Xbox Live, it will be free of charge, developers will love it and it will be worth devoting your entire life to and then I start to hear that online components are being dropped from several games because developers haven't been given enough information from Sony. If the Playstation 3 is going to win the next-gen war the online element is vital, so just weeks before the US and Japanese launch why isn't Sony's online system fully functional? From being super excited about the Playstation 3 online I'm now really worried we'll just get a carbon copy of the PlayStation 2's sub-standard service. Please reassure me Next3, you're my last hope.

Dave Terrace, Sheffield

STAR LETTER

■ **Sadly, details on the Playstation 3's online service are still sketchy at best. We do, however, know some things for sure. It will be free of charge to play online (Xbox Live is £6 per month), there will be different servers (instead of a central one a la Live) and you'll have a single Gamer Tag-style identity. We should have some more news next month however. We're off to test it at Sony. Sometimes we love our job.**

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MP3 or not MP3?

Will there be an MP3 feature on the PS3 as in the Xbox 360 and will there be a more improved CD playing feature this time round?

Paul Gibson, email

■ In short, yes. There will be all the usual built in stuff too like a visualizer and in-game playlists. Another great Microsoft idea... borrowed.

Bye by-lines

I've noticed that your magazine doesn't list the names of the people who wrote the articles like other magazines. Also, your DVD has no commentaries like on PSM3 (which – I know – is a bad magazine but they still have commentaries). Why is this?

Ian Craig, e-mail

■ Simple: there is one voice in Next3 and that's the voice of Next3. And there will be commentaries on the DVD when we start reviewing games. That is, after all, when we really get to grips with a game.

In the region

I'm due to go to the America in December. I've heard that the PS3 will be multi-regional. So, if I bought the PS3 and a few games in the States would I have any problems with it when I bring it back to England? Would it work okay? (Apart from I'd need a plug adapter.)

I should then be able to buy and play UK games on it when the PS3 gets its UK release in March right?

Keith Jacobs, email

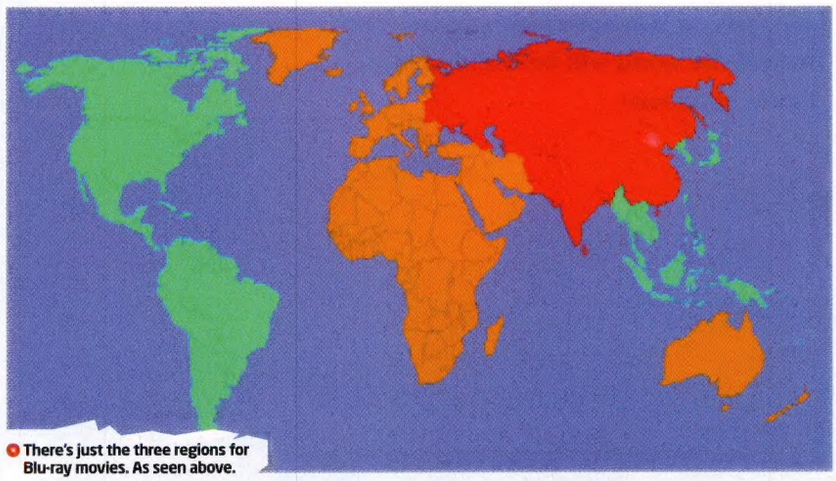
■ All games on PS3 will be region-free which means that a Japanese game will play on a UK console and vice versa. Blu-ray movies are, however, different. The US and Japan have the same region code (unlike DVDs) but the UK and Europe will be separate, so your PS3 won't play them.

No more waiting

Do you expect further delays for the Playstation 3?

Aaron Salmon, email

■ No we don't. We're not even going to countenance the thought.



There's just the three regions for Blu-ray movies. As seen above.

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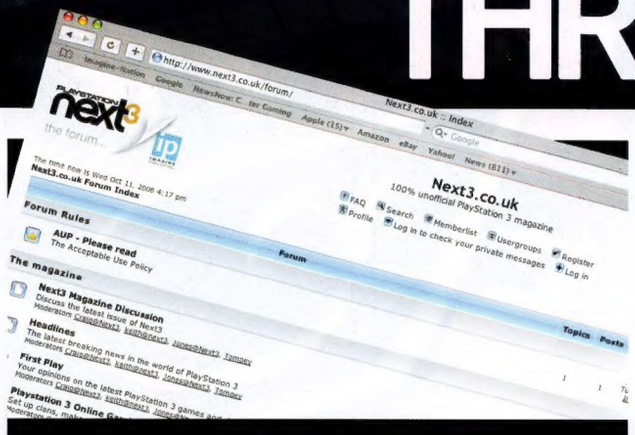


DOES THE DELAY MATTER?
The Next3 Forum Speaks

MACKNZIE I'm annoyed by the delay, but then again I'm still going to get the PS3 (hopefully at launch). It's likely that most people will have forgotten everything once they have their console, and the attention shifts to which games are coming out.

TOM479 A small reward would be nice come launch day, one free game perhaps to make up for the delay. I won't forget about the launch because it's ruined my Christmas.

WHINHAM Sony is testing us to see how far it can go, and stupidly we'll give in, but I won't be buying a PS3 until the price comes down, like in Japan.

TIMTT I hate the fact that we have to wait five months longer to get our eager hands on the PS3. But if you look at the delay more rationally the reasons are obvious.

PS3 Pre-orders Sell Out And Sony Says Euro Delay Doesn't Matter

THIS MONTH several PS3 pre-order campaigns launched in the US. GameStop announced it would accept 'limited' pre-orders in return for a $100 deposit. Expecting an allocation of only eight units per store, the chain issued a warning that its pre-orders didn't guarantee a PS3 on launch and that due to "extremely limited supply, we expect to deplete this allocation very quickly, most likely in minutes." Such was the case, and the inevitable queuing ensued, but of course the number of people lining up far exceeded the store's allocation, prompting the pre-order campaign to be closed.

While you'd obviously be very lucky to get your hands on a PS3 pre-order, it didn't take long for eBay coyotes to put their golden tickets up for sale. While we knew it was inevitable, it was still sad to see the start of a season where the entrepreneurial eBayers make a ton of cash on the back of devoted gamers' need for a PS3 on day one. Prices started in the thousands and went higher ending in one pre-order being snapped up for (Doctor Evil pinky fingers at the ready) one meeeeellion dollars. It's still unknown whether or not the auction was bogus, but ostensibly it all seemed legit. Though we don't seriously expect anyone to pay this sort of money, with people handing over thousands for the 'promise' of a unit on launch day, it exposes how excited Americans are about the prospect of owning one.

This strength of feeling was also evident in Japan where the launch is just days away. The price cut announced for the 20GB version has seen PS3 interest rise dramatically. According to a survey conducted by Japan-based ITmedia about which console the Japanese public intend to purchase by the end of the year, 39% said they plan to pick up a PS3 – that's just 1%

WORLDWIDE PLAYSTATION SHIPMENTS BREAKDOWN
N. AMERICA - 61.7 million
EUROPE - 40.1 million
JAPAN - 21.59 million
Total = 102.49 million units

WORLDWIDE PLAYSTATION 2 SHIPMENTS BREAKDOWN
N. AMERICA - 41.92 million
EUROPE - 38.50 million
JAPAN - 23.27 million
Total = 103.69 million units

WORLDWIDE PSP SHIPMENTS BREAKDOWN
N. AMERICA - 8.23 million
EUROPE - 5.04 million
JAPAN - 4.01 million
Total = 17.03 million units
EUROPE IS THE SECOND BIGGEST SELLING PLAYSTATION TERRITORY IN THE WORLD BUT GETS PS3 LAST. THANKS!

PRICE IS RIGHT

Japanese game prices announced

A contributing factor to the renewed Japanese interest in PS3 could well be Sony's recent disclosure of PS3 game prices. Despite conjecture leading up to launch about the potential high price point of PS3 titles, Sony announced the price of two of its launch titles: *Resistance: Fall Of Man* and *Genji: Days Of The Blade*. Both titles will retail for ¥5,980 (around £27). A steal. Sony has already confirmed that off-road racer *MotorStorm* will retail for the same price when it's released in Japan later in the year. It's unconfirmed as yet what price third-party publishers will affix to their games, but only a few weeks ago the notion of a cheap PS3 with affordable games was almost unthinkable and now our friends in the East have both, no wonder everyone's starting to take notice.

FIGURE IT OUT

Sales of PlayStation consoles in each territory

Despite official statistics disproving the claim that Europe buys more PlayStation consoles than any other territory, these figures do appear to demonstrate that we actually come a very close second and outsell Japan by a quite considerable margin. Will this trend change with the Playstation 3 because of the delay? Probably not, but we'll have to wait and see.

behind those who saic they'd be buying a Wii (360 scored just 16%). That the price cut has led to increased interest is a no-brainer, but it's still good to know that while prices are dropping PS3 demand is rising.

Things looking so promising in other territories, only adds to the hurt felt in launch-deprived Europe. But perhaps there are some positives: take game prices, while we shouldn't expect direct yen-to-pound conversions even if these games are priced £40 it still means that first-party will cost little more (or perhaps no more) than PS2 titles. Great news, but what price do third-party publishers have in mind? Though Sony has confirmed an official $60 rrp for games in the US, further investigation shows that retailers like Walwart are selling the likes of *Sonic The Hedgehog* for only $40. So, thanks to the wonder of region-free gaming even before the European launch, we can import the games we want the most for less.

Positives can found in the PS3 delay debacle, but Sony could make it so much easier if it chose its words more carefully. Early this month it felt the wrath of many a PlayStation fanboy by suggesting European gamers don't have a problem with the delay. In an interview with trade paper *MCV*, Sony Europe VP Jamie MacDonald said: "European consumers have shown that historically they don't mind [the delays] because they end up buying as many PlayStations, if not more, than the US and Japan. [...] If we were sitting here in five years' time, I don't think we'd really think about or notice that the Playstation 3 was four or five months later in Europe."

An interesting view, but if MacDonald read the hundreds of letters, forum posts and column inches we do he might not be so confident. If European's buy just as many PlayStation consoles as the US and Japan why alienate us by delaying the PS3 launch? Many presumed the order came from above to ensure Sony's homeland of Japan was placated, but according to SCEE president and CEO David Reeves SCE Europe had a lot of input in the decision-making process: "I want to make it clear that we were part of the executive committee in Tokyo, we thought it made sense to go in other regions and come back in March with a strong line-up and adequate stock. We were not forced into it."

Reeves suggested the delay was more a matter of logistics and believes that even if the launch had gone as planned, people would still be disappointed: "It's better to do two regions well and another one well later than to do one well, another half well and one not at all." A valid point, but what gets backs up is that again Europe has to be 'done later'. Reeves was at least apologetic for making us wait: "I'm sorry that in Europe it looks as though we're always third priority. [...] But at the time, when we announced the worldwide launch, it looked like there would be adequate stock." With fresh assurances that the March launch will be one of the biggest in the company's history, the best way to compensate gamers is to produce a console and games to exceed all expectations – if Sony manages that all may well be forgiven if not forgotten.

"It made sense to come back in March with a strong line-up and adequate stock. We were not forced into it"

David Reeves, Sony Europe

TOTAL GAME SATISFACTION

Was the Tokyo Game Show a success for Sony?

AFTER SONY'S disappointing E3 showing, and the Euro delay bombshell that followed, all eyes looked to TGS for the firm to regain the support of a disgruntled and alienated following. It seemed all was in place to take the masses by storm, the keynote speaker was non other than Sony president Ken Kutaragi who, it was hoped would convince an international audience that PS3 was the future – an ideal opportunity to excite, enthuse and inform the world before the Japanese and US launches, but with upgraded 20GB unit's parade officially rained on by a lack of new games, opinion is split as to whether it was an opportunity seized or squandered?

While Kutaragi's speech was peppered with talk of an open network where innovation and 'drastic ideas' can thrive; the extensive interconnectivity of PlayStation 3; and how great it is to be living in a time when this console is coming out there was little mention of games. Where was the expected avalanche of new announcements, of fresh and exciting IP, of the big guns Sony would come out firing in March? Sadly, such revelations failed to materialise. Kutaragi's conference was spliced with new game footage of all the usual suspects – *Ridge Racer*, *Virtua Fighter 5* and *Afrika* all had their moment in the sun and shone like so much spun gold. But apart from a few nuggets of information, what we gained from Sony was a ripple of new information when it should have been an all-consuming wave of revelations.

Although the keynote was decidedly off-key, focus shifted to the open question-and-answer session held shortly afterwards, which, curiously enough, unearthed the calibre of announcement we'd been waiting for. The biggest surprise involved the oft-overlooked lower-end 20GB PS3 with Kutaragi fairly causally mentioning that the 20-gig version will now

TGS GIVES RISE TO GMS

Kutaragi highlights future for PS3s online network

The main crux of Kutaragi's keynote was spent contemplating the technology that underwrites PS3, focusing on how the advances in hardware and Internet technology would take PS3 to new realms. First came the confirmation that gamers will be able to play emulated PSOne and PS2 games directly over the Internet, the first batch will consist of games that place only a small burden on the network, but these will expand as technology improves. We hope these new games will contain full Net play options so we have the chance to enjoy the online multi-player many missed out on due to PS2's poor online implementation. This online service should also offer Mega Drive and PC Engine titles, but is yet to be confirmed by Sega or the respective publisher.

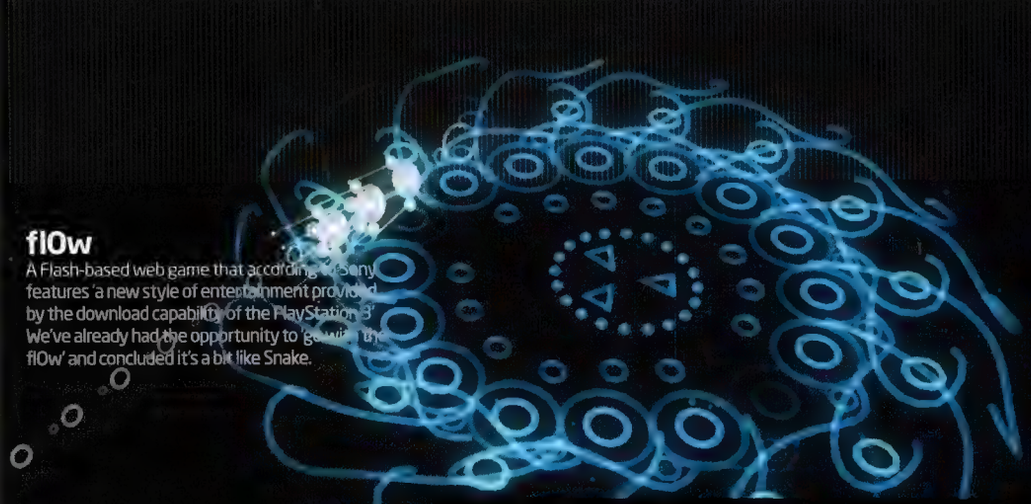
What is exciting is the concept Sony is calling the Global Mapping System (GMS). GMS will allow users to upload photos and data about their surroundings and then create a detailed virtual world in which they live within the PS3. It's hoped that by using such a system users will have direct interaction with developers and thus play an active role in game development. We can see it now: P13ase put mee in UR game, I Rok.

The offer of retro or back catalogue gameplay is essential if Sony is to compete with Xbox Live and Nintendo's online service, but it's this promise of user contribution that's intriguing. With no word on how this high-concept service will work we can only wait and see.

PLAYSTATION 3 TITLES PLAYABLE AT TGS

feature an HDMI port for the best quality high-definition video output (previously, the 20GB PS3 displayed HD images through component video). Before the show, only the 60GB version would offer true HD viewing, but now even the lowest spec PS3 promises to deliver what the Premium 360 and Wii cannot. But the good news didn't stop there as the PlayStation puppeteer went on to confirm a repricing of the 20GB version, seeing the price tag slide from ¥62,790 (£283) to a meagre ¥49,980 (£225). While of course the HDMI addition comes as great news and makes the 20-gig PS3 a much more attractive prospect, unfortunately the price reduction is limited to Japan only. But the Japanese won't be getting it all their own way; while European consumers will pay a standard RRP price for the much-sought-after 60GB, in the land of the rising sun it'll carry an 'open price' meaning that retailers can charge whatever they like. Given that there'll be only 100,000 units available at launch we're guessing the price is likely to be pretty high.

With a price cut seeming to come even before launch, industry analysts



flOw

A Flash-based web game that according to Sony features 'a new style of entertainment provided by the download capability of the PlayStation 3'. We've already had the opportunity to 'go with the flOw' and concluded it's a bit like Snake.

GAMES ON

New games announced at TGS and the best of the rest

At TGS, Phil Harrison disclosed that the company's vast array of international studios has around 200 titles in development, but what's more exciting is the fact that over half of these games are for PS3 indicating a very clear shift to the next generation of gaming. While not bursting at the seams with new games, Sony didn't turn up to the show completely empty-handed and hiding in the shade of big name behemoths like *Heavenly Sword* and *Gran Turismo HD* were several previously unannounced titles all of which are nestled comfortably in this month's preview section, but to get a taste of what to expect here is a complete run down of the new arrivals:

DREAMERS

A psychological action-adventure that takes you into the thoughts and dreams of a narcoleptic whose bouts of sleep start to become nightmares from which he might never wake up.

WHITE KNIGHT STORY

Fantasy RPG which places emphasis on size in terms of both environment and characters. You're given the freedom to explore massive country and cityscapes as well as transform into the gigantic White Knight during battle.

NINJA GAIDEN SIGMA

Team Ninja submits to PS3's charms and delivers a game that has something old, something new, something borrowed and something... black.

OBLIVION

Okay, this wasn't confirmed until after TGS, but is a welcome addition to the PS3 stable nonetheless, especially as we get some exclusive extra content.

SEGA GOLF CLUB

The third golf game to be announced for PS3, this features the Mizuno family, a trio of famous Japanese golfers, on real-life courses. It's set to be a launch title in Japan. Find out more on page 22.

WANGAN MIDNIGHT

Based on the Japanese comic of the same name, this delivers high-speed racing through the streets of Japan. Whether the races take place at midnight is yet to be confirmed.

MAH-JONG FIGHT CLUB ONLINE

Just so you know, the game of Mah-jong has little to do with fighting and lots to do with a weird strategy game involving tiles. This title allows players to prove their credentials against one of 48 computer players based on real-life experts from the professional Mah-jong league. Oooh...

The world's media gather for Kutaragi's keynote speech.

With Sony's profits taking a recent dip, much is resting on PS3's success.

The show confirmed that MGS4 and DMC4 will be huge system shifters for Sony

were quick to label the move a sign of weakness with prominent Japanese firm Retela Crea Securities branding the cut 'ridiculous'. However, having weathered a storm of criticism leading up to the show, Sony was unwilling to let such sentiment spoil the PlayStation party and went on to announce yet more high-definition features with Dolby Laboratories confirming formal support for PS3. This means Sony's new system is supported by Dolby Digital 5.1 surround sound for games (PS2 has the inferior Dolby Pro Logic II in-game) and Dolby TrueHD 7.1 surround for Blu-ray movies, making the PS3 the ultimate in both sound and screen quality. Though no next-gen format offers a sound upgrade for games, it was pleasing to see Sony delivering on its promise of games boasting the insanely high resolution of 1080p. Company president Phil Harrison was keen to point out that at the Tokyo Game Show there were six playable games running in 1080p. *Lair*, *Mobile Suit Gundam*, *Virtua Tennis 3*, *Gran Turismo HD*, *Ridge Racer 7* and *NBA '07* are all currently running in 1080p and Sony expects the number to increase before launch. Games like *Resistance: Fall Of Man* and *Metal Gear Solid* are both aiming for 1080p support.

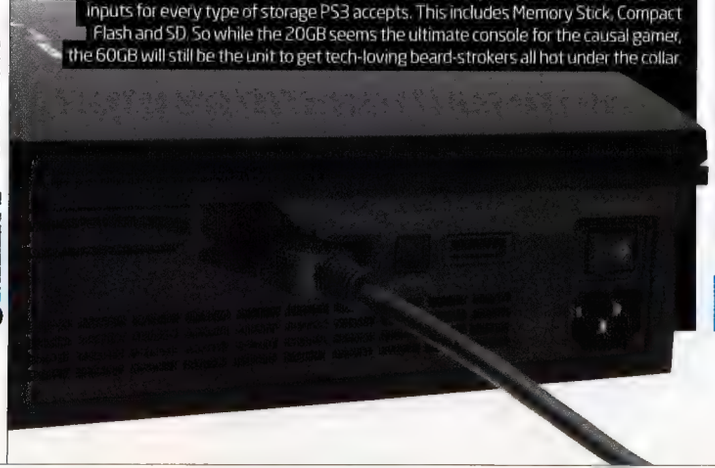
If there was a disappointing shortage of games in Sony's conference it certainly didn't disappoint on the show floor with plenty of playable code, news and fresh footage. Although Sony has yet to reveal the full PlayStation 3 launch line up, six games have been confirmed for the Japanese release in November. Insomniac's shooter *Resistance* will be joined by *Ridge Racer 7*, *Genji: Days Of The Blade*, *Sega Golf Club*, *Mobile Suit Gundam* and *Mah-Jong Fight Club Online*. The likes of *F1 Championship*, *Gran Turismo HD* and *MotorStorm* are slated for release in December with a winter debut promised for *Sonic The Hedgehog*, *Fatal Inertia*, and *NFS: Carbon*. Obviously this means that if all of these titles meet their Japanese release dates they'll be ready and waiting for us come March. The show also gave us a few clues as to which games might be held back for the European launch, with *Eye Of Judgment*, *Heavenly Sword*, *Monster Kingdom*, *Lair*, *Virtua Fighter 5* and *Virtua Tennis 3* all being given a dubious 'spring 2007' release date. Other PlayStation 3 big hitters such as *Devil May Cry 4* and *Final Fantasy XIII* still dwell in the game purgatory known as the 'TBC list'.

Despite lacking a release date for the game, Capcom announced a slew of new *DMC4* character, plot and play features (all of which you can read about in our monster preview on page 58), but what did TGS hold for the other famous Sony stalwart, *Metal Gear Solid 4*? Well, with people crowding around Konami's booth like "penguins during spawning period" (Kojima said it – don't ask) to see the stunning new trailer, Hideo Kojima offered some intriguing insights into the game. He admitted that he and his team

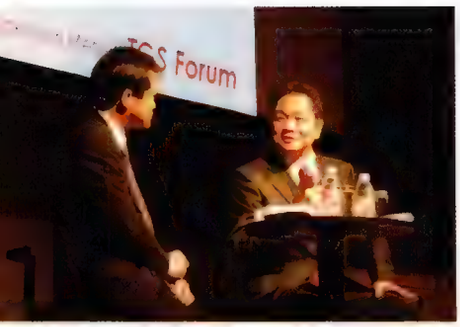
TWENTY SOMETHING

The new and improved 20GB PlayStation 3

The reason Kutaragi gave way for the addition of an HDMI port on the 20GB PS3 was that "HDMI compatible televisions are spreading faster than we expected." A good reaction to market trends from Sony, but with the low-end unit now boasting HDMI, what makes it so different from the premium pack? Of course, there's all that extra hard drive space, but the premium pack also features Wi-Fi capabilities allowing you to effortlessly transfer data between PS3 and PSP plus additional memory card inputs for every type of storage PS3 accepts. This includes Memory Stick, Compact Flash and SD. So while the 20GB seems the ultimate console for the casual gamer, the 60GB will still be the unit to get tech-loving beard-strokers all hot under the collar.



■ [illegible] ■ Hot Shots Golf 5 ■ Lair ■ Mah-jong Fight Club ■ Mobile Suit Gundam ■ MotorStorm



have "finally started to figure out the PS3" and that "Last year we were still trying to learn the PS3's potential. Now that we've figured out what we want to do, all we have to do now is create it." We just wish he'd get busy so we can play the damned thing.

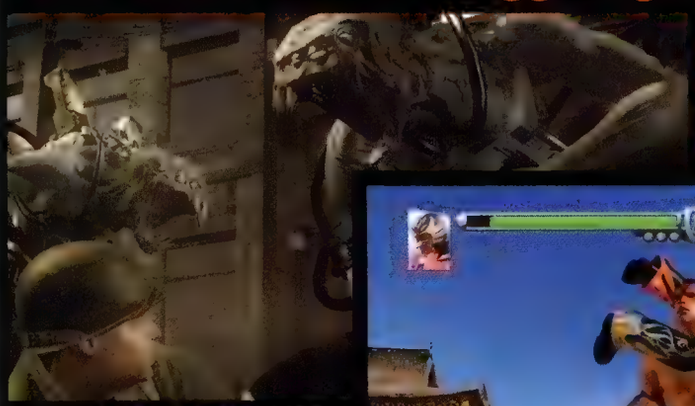
Strong showings from the likes of *Metal Gear Solid 4* and *Devil May Cry 4* only confirmed what we knew pre show that these titles will be huge system shifters for Sony, but it can't rely on its triple-A's alone. The Tokyo Game Show was the company's last chance to make a big impression on an international audience prior to the November US and Japanese launches, but the lack of fresh, innovative and exclusive games was disappointing. In light of X06 and Microsoft's tantalising 2007 release list, perhaps the decision to offer a focused technological discussion rather than specifying new products and features was a little naive. Will new games such as *flOw* really stand up to the likes of *Gears Of War*? Obviously not, but a game console that offers top-specification high-definition gaming, sound and a range of exciting launch games that could cost as little as £225? Now, that's an offer we'd find hard to refuse.

METAL GEAR SOLID 4

- The development team has travelled far and wide and undergone military training courses with former SWAT instructors to ensure the game's battle tactics are on the money
- There have been massive improvements to character models, especially Snake who's movement is extremely natural
- Where before characters were fictional, Kojima has stated that *Metal Gear Solid 4* will feature a group of characters based on real-life people

DID YOU KNOW?

New details on PS3's biggest games



RESISTANCE: FALL OF MAN

- New areas including snowy sections with ice-covered caves
- New tank-like vehicles used to fight one of the spider enemies you'll encounter
- New weapons including LAARk rocket launcher and flame-thrower

VIRTUA FIGHTER 5

- Game is arcade perfect using latest version of the game, Revision A
- Full cast of characters including new entrants El Blaze and Eileen
- Sega has created a new PS3 'Virtua' arcade stick to accompany the game

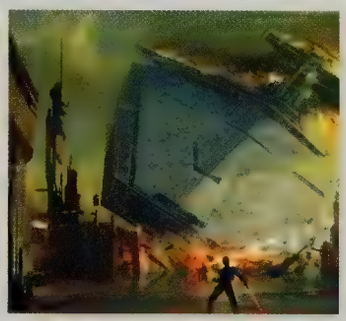
GRAN TURISMO HD

- Two versions of the game set for release: Premium and Classic. The Premium version is microtransaction-based – you pay a supplement for new cars and tracks
- Game running at full 1080p
- Polygon counts going through the roof, helping to deliver impossibly detailed cars and tracks

newsflashes

STAR WARS GETS RADICAL

Whilst *Star Wars* fan boys are still marvelling at the latest tech demo to come out of the LucasArts laboratory, fresh news has reached us about the fate of one of its most popular franchises, *SW Battlefront*. Previously developed by Pandemic Studios it now seems that the torch is being passed to *TimeSplitters*' developer Free Radical. At this time no party is willing to comment on the claim but with a recent long term deal struck between the two, taking advantage of Free Radical's years of FPS experience would certainly make sense.

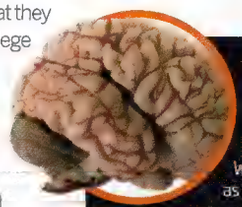


PS3 PERIPHERALS UNVEILED

Old game saves come along for the ride

LAST MONTH we reported on the existence of a device that would allow you to transfer your old game save data from your PSone and PS2 memory cards to the PS3 and now the very first images of the device have surfaced. Whilst some bemoan the fact that they have to pay a few extra pounds for the privilege we're grateful that all those hours levelling up characters and unlocking content will not be lost forever. The card adaptor will be available for launch in Japan so we can expect it to join us in March. It retails at 1,500 Japanese yen making that around the £7 mark, but seeing as Europe usually gets stiffed on this sort of thing we're sure a few pounds will be tacked on for good measure. The peripheral connects via USB and enables you to transfer old saves to your PS3 Hard Drive: an option not offered to 360 gamers by Microsoft.

Alongside the adaptor Sony also released info regarding its BD remote control, which should cost around £20. The 'BD' moniker indicates its convenience for Blu-ray playback and will use Bluetooth to interact with the PS3 just like the control pads. On the subject of the PS3 controller the 'Sixaxis' has been confirmed by Sony as its official name.



After Thought

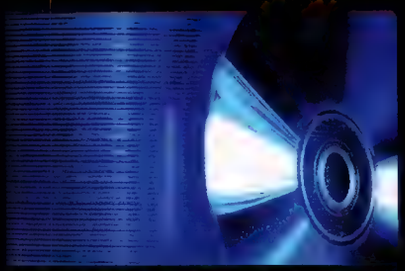
Price Plans

We fully expect to pay as much for a Sixaxis as we would for a 360 pad or a Wii-mote, but should we? Motion-sensing technology aside the Sixaxis is lacking the rumble feature boasted by the other 'big two' but according to Sony if it added rumble to the Sixaxis the price tag would be too high. In a recent interview SCEA's Kaz Hirai asserted "if we have to come up with technology to isolate the vibration from the sensing, that means that the controllers are going to be so expensive, then we're doing the consumer a huge disservice."

However Hirai's statement prompted the CEO of Immersion Victor Viegas to say that his company has ways to combine motion-sensing with rumble for minimal cost. It seems strange that Sony would be proclaiming cost as the rationale for losing rumble when the PS3 console it wirelessly communicates with is already on the pricey side.

BLU-RAY IS FOR GAMES NOT MOVIES

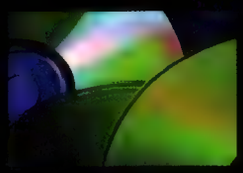
Sony claim PS3 is not burdened by the cost of Blu-ray



SONY'S PRESIDENT of worldwide studios, Phil Harrison has insisted that the decision to include Blu-ray functionality in the PlayStation 3 has not burdened the console with 'unnecessary cost'. Speaking in a recent interview Harrison asserted that the cost of including the new technology is 'non-existent' and that it's essential to the development of Sony's next-gen software: 'There's this sort of misunderstanding that the Blu-ray disc player for movies is somehow burdening the console with unnecessary cost. That is completely not true. We put Blu-ray disc functionality in the console purely from a game design point of view.'

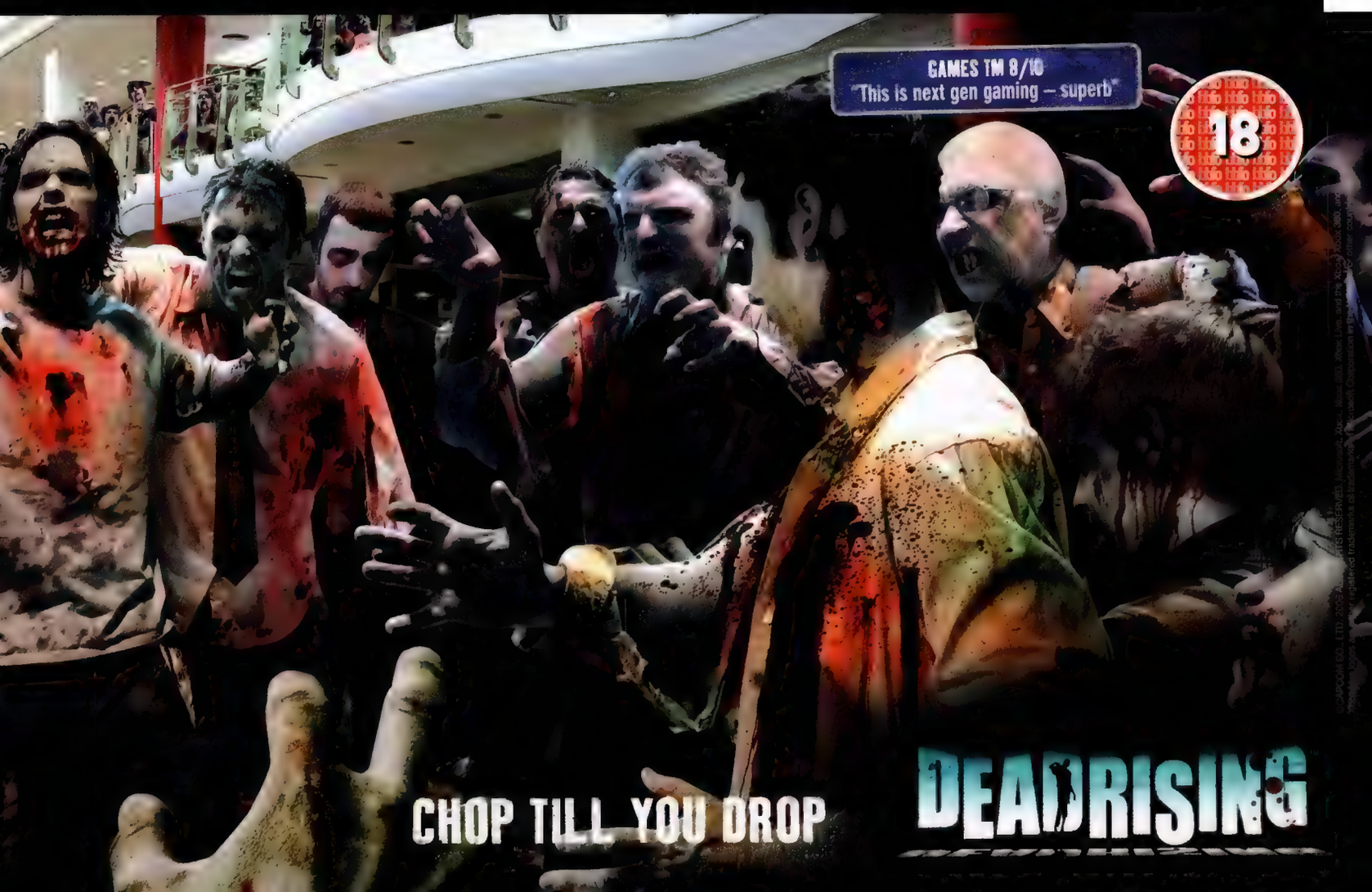
Surely none of us are so naive as to believe that the addition of Blu-ray hasn't contributed to the hefty price tag of the Playstation 3 – it is after all a device that consumers will be expected to fork out around £1000 for as a standalone option. It has been one of the contentious issues surrounding the Playstation 3 since its conception and has been the deciding factor in the European delay, but it does appear that Sony is trying its best to clarify the PlayStation 3's position as a game-centric unit with Harrison maintaining that 'Once we had that storage capacity on Blu-ray disc, adding the movie playback functionality was extremely cost-effective.' It seems a viable reason and so rather than force a HD movie player on people as companies such as Microsoft has suggested, Sony is simply adding an extremely desirable addition to a technology designed for games.

Sony UK senior VP and MD Ray Maguire echoed that by saying 'For us Blu-ray is important because it is the only format that can carry enough information to give us the best games in the world.' So whilst it's clear the development for Blu-ray most probably is one of the contributing factors to the price of the PS3, with its capacity to store up to 50GB of information compared to the 20GB of a HD-DVD Sony believes that extra investment will pay dividends.



THREE-RAY
Three formats on one disk

The concept of a format war could be one rendered obsolete by the clever minds behind the idea of cramming three whole formats onto each storage unit, namely DVD, HD-DVD and Blu-ray. Added together, that's a total of around 85Gb of information per disc, which compared to DVDs alone at around 5Gb, makes for all kinds of possibilities. Warner employees Alan Bell and Lewis Ostrover maintain that the creation of a three-way disc is well within the realm of possibility. The idea of layering different formats together is not a new one, and it's made possible by the fact that HD-DVD information is stored in 0.6mm pits, while Blu-ray uses 0.1mm, allowing for both formats to be accommodated on the one disc. Whilst the manufacturing process is considerably more complex, and therefore expensive, the overall implication for both producers and consumers is a reduced price, better availability and far greater variety as it would undoubtedly become the storage medium of choice for everyone creating home-use media.



next3 media
the BIG screen

High-definition gaming at its best

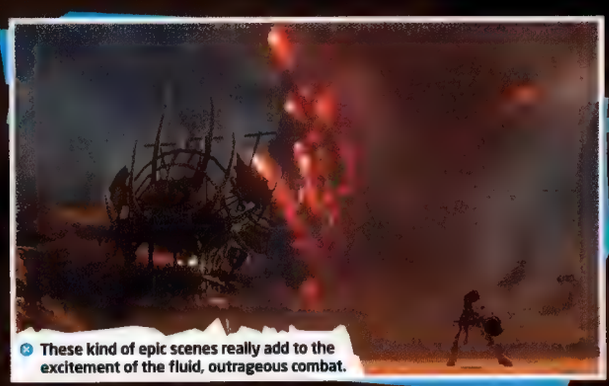
GOD OF PERSIA MAY CRY

HEAVENLY SWORD

OUT: TBA 2007

ABOUT// Sort out the little things in life and the big things will slot into place all by themselves. The same could be said of videogames. How many of the truly great titles receive acclaim for those little things, that attention to detail that shows us all just how much the developers care? Judging from those little things in Sony's upcoming slash-a-thon, *Heavenly Sword*, it looks like we could be looking at a defining piece of videogame history. So what more have we seen from this action-packed romp to up our collective excitement? Well, in short, a little more gameplay. Whilst the TGS showing wasn't much different to that shown at E3, there's all manner of lovely touches, like a massive array of emotion from both the lead protagonist as well as every other character in the game, unsurprising when you think that Andy Serkis is on board in a diverse capacity involving writing, casting, acting, direction and motion capture. Being able to scale up from one-on-one encounters to massive multi-directional combat with the greatest of ease is another impressive point, whilst the cinematography, variety of combat and huge interactive environments might not be classed as little things, what we've seen of *Heavenly Sword* makes us believe that it has what it takes to make *God Of War*, *Devil May Cry* and *Prince Of Persia* look sluggish, lifeless and clunky. In short it's looking Heavenly.

Heavenly sword **just keeps looking better and better, and right now it looks to be one of the best games we've ever seen.**



These kind of epic scenes really add to the excitement of the fluid, outrageous combat.

newsflashes

JAFFE ON PS3

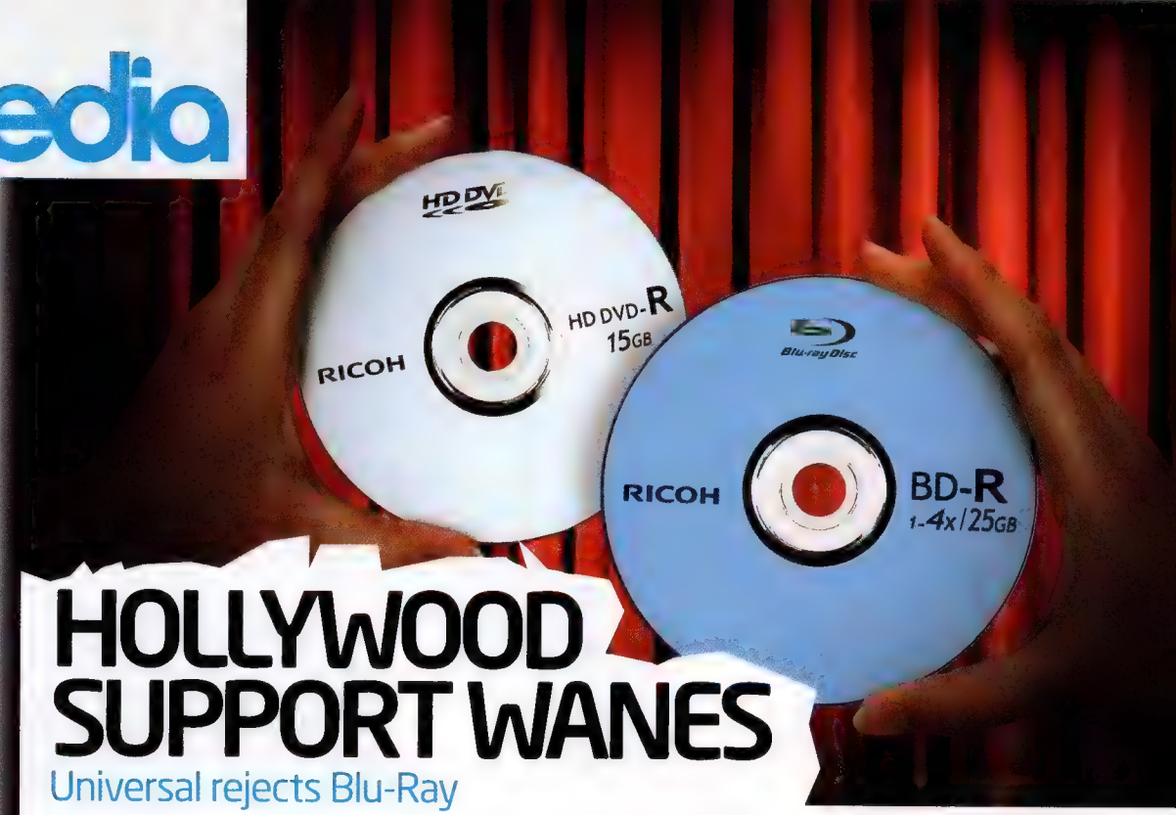
David Jaffe, the mind behind such classics as *Twisted Metal* and *God of War*, has let it slip that he's got a PS3 title in the works. Set to be unveiled to the general public very soon, the acclaimed creator was pretty hyped about the game which he says mixes aspects of *Twisted Metal* and *Bomberman* as well as "a few other things"... a three-headed Hydra perhaps.

SONY AND MICROSOFT SITTING IN A TREE...

Win an Xbox 360... brought to you by Sony. It sounds crazy, but it's actually happening, and with so many fingers in so many pies, we're surprised it doesn't happen more. In a promotion for Jessica Simpson's new album, *A Public Affair*, the sweepstake winner nets a 360 courtesy of Sony. It's a crazy world.

HARMONIXTV

Viacom-owned MTV is looking to forge a marriage of convenience with *Guitar Hero* creator Harmonix in a deal worth a mighty $175 million. "The acquisition of Harmonix will deepen MTV's connection to its audience via online, mobile and console music gaming." Said MTV President Christina Norman when asked about the buy out which should complete by the end of the year.



HOLLYWOOD SUPPORT WANES

Universal rejects Blu-Ray

IN A comprehensive dismissal of Sony's proprietary storage medium this month, Universal Studios' President Craig Kornblau has made his feelings clear about the future, or lack thereof, of Blu-ray. "Look at the blogs, look at the reviews by the early adopters and even look at the mainstream media – HD-DVD has maintained its first-to-market advantage and delivered on the promises of providing the best high definition image and sound quality at the best value for consumers today." Said Kornblau, unequivocally proclaiming that HD-DVD would come out on top in the storage medium skirmish. In terms of availability and price, the Universal boss has solid ground for his argument, as HD-DVD utilizes similar methods of manufacture to current DVD technology, reducing both production and transition costs. Putting it as simply as possible, in an interview regarding the storage format war, Director for the Center for Global Business Studies, Fariborz Ghadar, makes the point that "In this kind of battle, the guy who is out there first and cheaper is going to be the winner," and at the moment that looks a lot like being HD-DVD but we should never underestimate the sheer power and storage size of the big Blu.

WHO'S SIDE ARE YOU ON?

Who's backing who in the format wars

HD-DVD BACKERS:
- Universal Studios
- Paramount
- Warner Bros.

BLU-RAY BACKERS:
- Paramount
- Sony Pictures
- Warner Bros.
- MGM
- 20th Century Fox
- Disney

Could we be seeing classic Mega Drive titles like *Sonic* and *Contra* hitting our PS3s?

PSMEGADRIVE?

Kutaragi's keynote confuses everyone

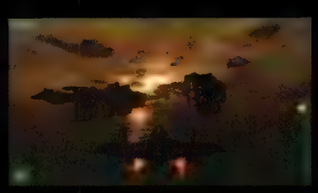
In Ken Kutaragi's TGS keynote speech plans were unveiled for the downloading of Sega Mega Drive and PC Engine titles, along with videos, and the possibility of a Global Mapping system allowing users to upload data and shots of their own. Whilst the brief mention of the ability to download classic Mega Drive and PC Engine titles was merely touched upon, a lapse in translation resulted in a storm of rumour that Sega was bedding down with Sony, something Sega dismissed. To quell the rumours, a statement was released confirming that nothing had been finalised. "Distribution of Mega Drive content through e-Distribution is something that cannot be formally announced by our company... we're now at the step of looking into it." So those eager to play the likes of *Sonic* will have to be sated by the new title set to launch alongside the PS3 in March.

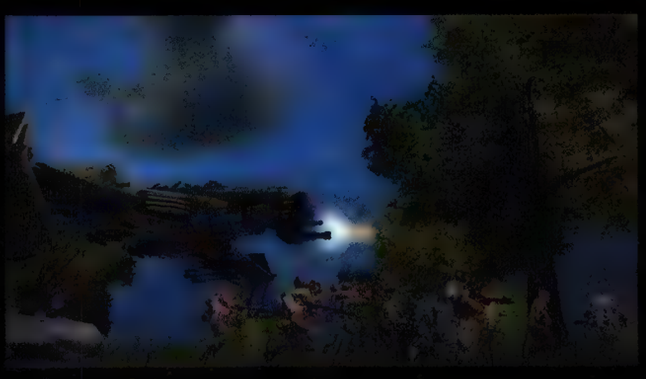
6 Things we love

6 things we love about...

Warhawk

MAYDAY, MAYDAY, HAWK DOWN, HAWK DOWN





1// Sixaxis of evil The first game to include full tilt control support, *Warhawk*'s flying will undoubtedly be the most immersive you've ever played. You'd better start working those wrists though, as *Warhawk* is one of the more physically demanding shooters we've seen.

2// The skies have it If you've seen some of the intense aerial combat, you'll be aware of how impressive the dogfighting can be. Surrounded by hundreds of aircraft, fully intent on turning you into a light fricassee of pilot, the combat is painfully extreme at points.

3// Down to earth Whilst we're not too keen on the recently demoed on-foot sections, as they look a good deal less impressive than the rest of the game, the ability to land pretty much anywhere you like and trade vehicles is one that excites us greatly.

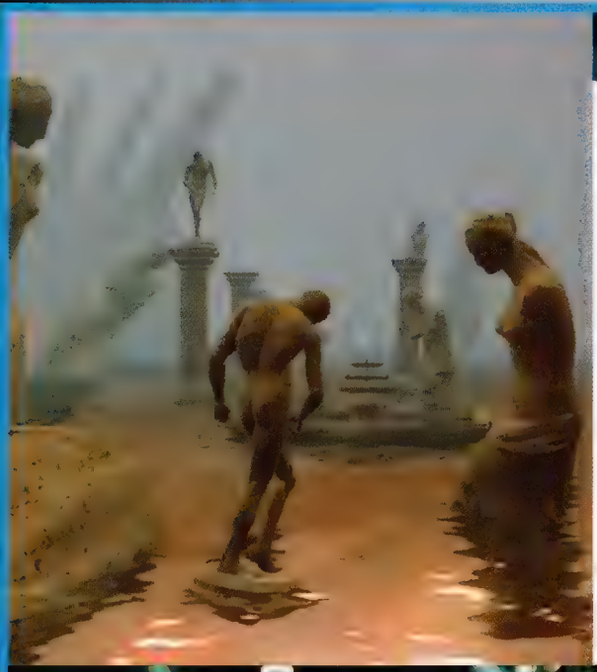
4// Size isn't everything... but it sure helps. There are hundreds of square miles of terrain in *Warhawk* and being able to affect the battles from the skies or ground means there are thousands of ways to achieve your objectives.

5// It's raining cats and dogfighters Imagine the majesty of hurtling through the sky barking orders at your mates in the massive 32 online multi-player mode. What's more is that we've been promised a whole bunch of groovy downloadable goodies such as maps, vehicles and weapons.

6// While those around you are losing theirs It doesn't feel like a simple matter of you versus the entire opposing army, as with the battle raging above and below, you feel like a small – but important – part of a well-oiled war machine.

JUST ANNOUNCED

NEW GAMES



DREAMERS

THE WHAT// There's not much out there about *Dreamers'* gameplay, indeed, even the name hasn't been finalised, but the story revolves around a heavy narcoleptic called Jorge. The story, dreams and nightmares will all be tailored somehow to the gamer's personal fears. Jorge's night time troubles are worsening, you see, and it's only a matter of time before they completely take over his life, making the search for a cure or explanation truly desperate. We've never suffered from narcolepsy, but judging from much of the stylish concept art and early interviews with the Dreamgazers it should feature plenty of unique ideas. Set mostly within Jorge's dreams, and with a hint of real-world Greece, *Dreamers* certainly sounds intriguing if nothing else.

THE WHO// It seems Canada-based developer Dreamgazers has a completely different outlook to most. While it hasn't managed to snag a publisher as of yet, the small development team has been working tirelessly on the title since 2003, under the watchful eyes of George Georgeadis the founder of the company. Aside from past concept art and a couple of renders, there's really very little to go on as we can't find evidence of any previous titles in their stable. The lack of publisher could very well be a good thing though, as, with this kind of project – namely a self-indulgent piece of artwork – interference from any other quarter is usually detrimental to the overall quality.

DEF JAM 3

THE WHAT// One of the most violent, and horribly playable titles in the Electronic Arts stable of games makes a return on the PlayStation 3. This iteration looks to be a considerable lot less comic than any previous titles from the franchise though. It features some genuinely horrendous holds and a few bone-crunching strikes as well as awesome music-reactive backgrounds.

THE WHO// Well, it's Electronic Arts isn't it. The studio responsible for the BAFTA award-winning *Fight Night Round 3* are on the case here. EA Chicago is a development team blessed with an obsessively keen eye for detail and a real drive for quality. *Def Jam 3* is looking set to be a benchmark title.

SKATE

THE WHAT// A brand new IP from Electronic Arts, looking to break into a market almost completely dominated by *Tony Hawk* since the turn of the millennium. Apparently the tricks are based on physics rather than set animations, meaning no two tricks will be the same, and being EA you can pretty much guarantee a sparkling musical score.

THE WHO// EA's Blackbox Vancouver studio, the team behind *Need For Speed Underground* and *NHL 2004* have been working on this for some time now, and if we were to hazard a guess, we'd have to bet that *Skate* will be very much for the casual gamer and feature high customisability as well as a few (sort of) famous faces.

SEGA GOLF CLUB

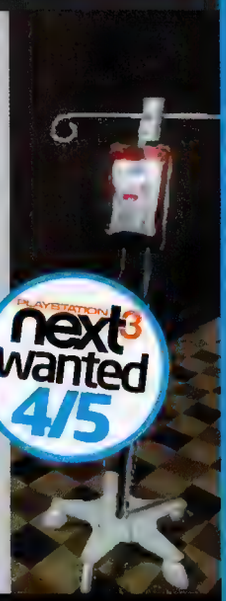
THE WHAT// Direct competition to Sony's *Minna No Golf* and *Tiger Woods '07*, *Sega Golf Club* (also known as *Miyazato San Kyoudai Naizou*) takes a more realistic approach, and features what, by all accounts is a famous Japanese golfing family, the Miyazatos. In essence then, it's a golfing with a surrogate family sim. Weird.

THE WHO// sega jas been churning out this kind of accessible, throwaway fun in the arcades for years, but is arcade golf going a little too far? There's no question of the pedigree, and there's little doubt that it'll do well in Japan with the celebrity Miyazatos on board, but is this going to fit with Sega's Western portfolio?

Keeping you bang up-to-date with all the latest game announcements on PlayStation 3

THE GOOD// It sounds like the attitude is genuinely different, and with the narrative touching on a number of more adult-themed issues such as religion and sex, *Dreamers* could be something completely different. The level of realism aimed for by Dreamgazers, using the Reality Engine is also something worthy of note with the focus being on empathy with the characters. We're not even sure of the gameplay style as yet though, as it could involve anything from puzzling to action to rhythm-action. Much of the concept art leaves us completely baffled though, and for the minute we see that as a good thing.

THE BAD// There are some rather obvious issues with *Dreamers*, not least the lack of publisher. On a number of occasions we've seen original titles fall by the wayside due to a lack of backing. The other issue is how little evidence of gameplay there has been. Sure there's been a lot of rhetoric from around the studio, but little real proof of the actual game. Indeed, while a PlayStation 3 version of the game has been confirmed, work on the port has yet to be started, leaving us in two minds as to the certainty of the project.



THE GOOD// Without *Smackdown* to sate your lust for grappling, *Def Jam* could be your only outlet. Without taking anything away from THQ's seminal grappler, this iteration seems to have received a good deal more attention in the transition to next-gen gaming than *Smackdown* has.

THE BAD// There are, as usual, concerns about the intricacy of combat, and just how far EA Chicago has gone to make this a next-gen title. Could this be a sequel too far for the boys at EA? If they don't up the complexity, it could be.

THE GOOD// This idea of physics-driven animation combined with EA's knack of putting a nice sheen of culture on its titles indicates that *Skate* will be a firm favourite for a chart position. Let's face it, the *Pro Evo/ FIFA* debate proves there's plenty of room in the charts for two kings of a genre.

THE BAD// With so much experience in the extreme sports genre, Neversoft's *Tony Hawk* series looks unlikely to ever be surpassed in terms of slick controls and style. Going up against the high flyer of the extreme sports world, *Skate* could well look a little underdeveloped on PS3.

THE GOOD// Sega Golf Club seems to sit nicely between the existing franchises with the fun of *Minna No Golf* and the realism of *Tiger Woods* and his *PGA Tour* titles. For anyone searching for this kind of balance it could well be the perfect sporting title. Who's to say?

THE BAD// Our only real question is whether this will suit a Western market. While the Miyazatos will be a big draw to the Japanese market, over here they're nobodies. A release isn't guaranteed however, so perhaps we'll see a few changes before it hits our shores.

NEWS IN NUMBERS

Everything you need to know broken into numerical factoids

0 360 games running in native 1080p

1 HDMI port included in 20Gb PS3

2 games have lost their online component this month

4 awards were picked up by Sony titles at this years BAVGA

7 titles scheduled for 1080p release

24 player slots available for online section of *Battlefield: Bad Company*

47 new users on our forum this month - become number 48

165 (unconfirmed) PS3 titles in development at time of writing

458 amount in pounds *Gran Turismo* would cost you if you bought all the downloads for Polyphony's racer

516 products shown at last year's Tokyo Game Show

560 amount in (USD) millions Sony has lost due to battery recall and PS3 discount issues

573 total number of products shown at this year's TGS

1,701 booths at this year's TGS

5,980 price in yen of *Genji: Days Of The Blade* and *Resistance: Fall Of Man*. This equates to just over £27.

10,000 character animations in *Assassin's Creed*

15,000 PS3 kiosks to hit retailers across North America and Canada for PS3's release

49,980 cost in Yen of 20GB PS3, which equates to around £230

4,000,000 cost in pounds sterling to high street retailer GAME due to delay of the PS3

30,000,000 cost in dollars of the 15,000 demo units proposed for the US PS3 release

278,000,000 Q2 profits in dollars for Sony this year

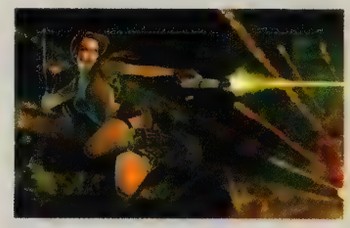
newsflashes

PS3 GETS XFIRED

Last month we reported Sony's *Untold Legends: Dark Kingdom* could be the first to incorporate online functionality via the Xfire gaming servicer. Well, this month the official conformation came from Sony HQ, who say that the service will be a valuable tool in its efforts to create an online service to rival Xbox Live. CEO of Xfire, Mike Cassidy, even alluded to the prospect of more titles supporting the service. "Working with SOE on one of their highly anticipated Playstation 3 launch titles is a very exciting beginning for Xfire's new console game product."

LONG WAIT FOR LARA

PS3 players hoping to get hands on with Lara Croft are going to have to wait at least a year before she graces PS3. Lurking at the bottom of a recent press release about Eidos' annual profits was an interesting sentence that read "Our 2008 products will include news versions of *Tomb Raider* (including a PS3 version) and many of our other key franchises." Famed for not rushing its games onto new hardware hopefully this meaty gap will give Eidos developers such as Crystal Dynamics and Io Interactive the time they need to deliver true next-gen versions of *Tomb Raider* and *Hitman*.



SIREN SERIES COMING TO PS3

According to retail reports in Japan Sony is set to bring *Siren* to the PS3. But what has started the rumour mill churning? The developer responsible for the first two games has been recruiting for new staff suggesting that a third instalment in the series is in the works. Though we received the standard "Sony does not comment on speculation and rumour" response, a *Siren* game would make an excellent stable mate for the likes of *F.E.A.R.*

UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2007 WILL SUPPORT PS3 MODS

Epic welcome user contributions

TIM SWEENEY, the CEO of Epic, has confirmed that the Playstation 3 version of *Unreal Tournament 2007* will allow the usage of mods (user-created software used to modify certain aspects of the game). Speaking in a recent interview he actively encouraged the modding community to contribute and suggested that Sony's new online model allows for more flexibility than Xbox Live: "Unfortunately it's more of a closed platform, [Microsoft seems to be] quite negative toward user-created content."

Synonymous with the mod squad scene, Sweeney stated that the community was "an essential part of [Epic's] success" and that "we would love to transfer this mod community over to the console platforms." This is yet another endorsement for Sony's open online system that aims to promote creativity and user participation. Sweeny's words come hot on the heels of Ken Kutaragi's announcement of the PS3's Global Mapping System that looks to increase user interaction with developers allowing them to have an active role in the development of future games. For more information on just what you can expect from *Unreal Tournament* on the PS3 check out our preview on page 70.

WHAT'S IN THE BOX?

PS3 box contents unveiled

DESPITE HAVING to wait until March to get our sweaty pasty hands on the content of our very own PS3 box, thanks to a few glossy brochures that made there way into Japanese retailers we now have a very good idea of what's waiting inside it:

- 1x *Playstation 3 Hardware (A)*
- 1 x *Sixaxis Controller (B)*
- 1x *USB cable (C)*
- 1x *Stereo AV cable (Stereo AV, Component. D-terminal, multi-terminal) (D)*
- 1x *Ethernet cable (E)*
- 1x *Power Cable (F)*

There's yet to be any official confirmation as to what the European package will be but there's a good chance this could be the bundle. If that were the case it would seem the PS3 will ship with everything needed for high-def playback apart from the small matter of high definition cables. Already aware that a HDMI cable would not be included in the box, it seems that both models of the PS3 will be packaged with only composite (read: white and yellow) cables meaning that any Japanese tech-head who craves the true high definition experience will have to make a separate purchase.

On the bright side it seems Sony is keen to push the PS3-to-PSP link up by including a USB cable. Plus the Playstation 3's AV Multi Out interface accepts the same cables the PS2 does, so if you're in possession of an S-Video, D or Component cable you should be able to reuse them. We'll be bringing you more next month so forget *Deal or No Deal* and stick we us for the latest on the only box worth peeking into.

THE UK'S BEST MONTHLY PSP MAGAZINE

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the hot3list

TEN OF THE BEST. YOU LOVE IT REALLY...

TEN OF THE HAPPIEST GOINGS ON IN THE WORLD OF PS3

01 HANDS ON PS3

Next3 gets its first taste of life with a PS3. Although it wasn't ours, just a teaser from Sony, we got all day to monkey around with the system and, more importantly *Motorstorm* and *Resistance: Fall Of Man*. We've all played the machine before, but being able to grope, fondle and otherwise pore over the sexy black contraption is a completely different matter. We'll stop gushing now, and leave it for our hands-on coverage.

NEW, PRO-RETINOL 02 GAMING

According to recent research from the University of Texas, gaming slows the ageing process. This could well be why we're so youthful in both looks and our outlook on life. Apparently, us gamers not only maintain a healthier level of mental agility, but the results of a similar French study indicate games are likely to make you more promiscuous. So, games keep you young and help you have more sex, eh? Of course the actuality of it is that games make you fat and unattractive, but we like to hear this kind of stuff every once in a while.

03 POUND FOR POUND

It's been a long time coming, but the speculation about the price of PS3 gaming is nearly over with the official announcement that software will cost $59.99 in North America. While the European prices aren't likely to be declared until much later, we can (fairly) safely say that the price of PS3 games at launch over here is going to be the same as the Xbox 360's at launch. Sony Computer Entertainment Europe has of course refused to comment on the matter, but Play.com is taking pre-orders for £49.99.

04 LIVING IN OBLIVION

We've reported on the rumours before, but the official announcement that the PC and 360 smash *Oblivion* is coming to PS3 as a launch title has got our juices flowing. What is perhaps a little surprising however, is that Ubisoft is taking over from TakeTwo as publisher of Bethesda Softwork's mammoth RPG. A PSP version is also in the works, but how exactly the sheer size and intricacy of the game will fit on a UMD, we'll never know.

05 30 MILLION DOLLAR BABIES

Seemingly taking on Nintendo's idea that 'playing is believing', Sony has promised a budget of 30 million US dollars to make sure that everyone has a chance to sample the PS3 in stores up and down North America and Canada. That sum of money equates to 15,000 demo units. Some of you might be a little miffed that many of these units wont be on sale, but when you think that PS2 had only 3,000 units over the same area at launch, it's nice to know there'll be plenty around for us to sample... in the States.

06 20GB PS3 NOT CRAP

While many of us wouldn't have passed up the opportunity of getting hold of a 20GB PS3, those with the lower grade machine would eventually feel hard done by what with the proposed lack of 1080p playback. Thankfully, Sony has relented and decided to include an HDMI port in the 20GB version. The possibility of a price drop come the European launch is an exciting prospect as well.

07 GOING FOR A 1080P

Guarantees of 1080p games are pretty hard to come by so the pledge of six PS3 titles running in glorious high definition is something of a scoop. The games that Sony boss Phil Harrison indicated as being in 1080p are *Lair*, *Mobile Suit Gundam*, *Virtua Tennis 3*, *Gran Turismo HD*, *Ridge Racer 7* and *NBA '07*. The numbers of confirmed HD titles are set to rise exponentially with titles like *Resistance: Fall Of Man* looking to bolster the ranks.

08 THE SOUND OF SILENCE

You could probably forgive such a powerful machine for having a few noise issues, but we've been in close proximity to the PS3 and have to say that it's quiet as a mouse. Even when we got up close to whisper sweet nothings to it we could barely hear the gentle hum of its fan or the heat of its innards. The power supply is internal as well, negating the need for a whacking great cable – it really is a sexy contraption.

09 SIZE MATTERS

We get horribly excited about the latest HDTVs, and while the last one we reported on was approximately the size of associate editor Keith Hemsley, Sony has gone one better and created its latest rear-projection monster in the image of (or at least the size of) Editor-in-Chief Nick Jones. At 70 inches, the KDS-R70XBR2 is among the sexiest pieces of technology we've ever seen. Full HD 1920x1080 native SXRD panel resolution, 1080p HDMI input, WEGA engine HD with DRC-MFv2.5 digital processing, 2.5ms display panel response time and up to 10,000:1 ratio makes for a pretty appealing prospect, especially at under $7,000.

10 GO WITH THE flOw

The addition of Masters student Jenova Chen's thesis project, flOw, to the TGS line up might at first seem like nothing more than an interesting diversion from all those polygons flying about in other games, but what we found intriguing was not only the competent use of motion sensor technology, but also the promise that it's original titles like this that will find themselves on the PS3 download listings.

RUMOUR CONTROL

Fact or fiction... you decide

1 There's been a lot of speculation about the state of the Blu-ray storage medium of late. It looks as if Sony will bundle in Blu-ray movies with some titles to not only make the games more appealing but also to show the general public just how great Blu-ray is.

While there's a fair chance that you'll get the occasional Blu-ray teaser here and there, the idea that entire movies would be made available is a little too generous for us to believe. Might be nice though.

RATING 2/5

2 Free Radical and LucasArts have been doing a bit of whispering in the wings recently, but despite their secrecy, the truth behind their collusion has been revealed. We can expect a next-gen *Battlefront* sometime in the coming year.

There seems to have been a bit of a falling out between LucasArts and *Battlefront* developer Pandemic, with the development studio putting *Mercenaries 2* up for grabs. So it's not beyond the realms of possibility that this arrangement may come to pass.

RATING 4/5

3 Eidos just can't stop making *Tomb Raider* titles and with the announcement that *Tomb Raider Legends* was its biggest money maker last year it has promised a line up that includes a PS3 Lara adventure.

Speaking about next year's line up, an Eidos spokesperson had this to say about the possibility: "Our 2008 products will include new versions of *Tomb Raider* (including a PS3 version) and many of our other key franchises." Fairly decisive, huh.

RATING 4/5

4 With Wii's price being set at a ridiculously low level, and Sony concerned about its flagging popularity, a price drop in Europe by next spring is an almost guaranteed certainty.

A price drop is far from guaranteed, but something in response to sales would be due around the springtime mark. The reduced price of the 20GB version in Japan would also indicate a lowering of the much-maligned PlayStation 3 pricing also. We wouldn't hold our breath though.

RATING 2/5

5 The level of innovation in Sony's products is something we've all been talking about for some while, but with the EyeToy growing ever more complex and motion-sensor technology at the forefront of PS3's appeal, it's time for Sony to create something new. With that in mind, the idea that voice recognition control is to feature in the next generation of games is a strong one.

One of the most spurious rumours we've heard for a long time. Pure, total, complete and utter rubbish. Maybe one day, eh.

RATING 0/5

next³ media

the BIG screen

High-definition gaming at its best

KING OF STING

FIGHT NIGHT ROUND 3

OUT: MARCH 2007

ABOUT// For almost a year now we've had to listen to Microsoft talk about how having such a big head start will make all the difference in determining the outcome of the next-gen war. But in many ways Microsoft's early-starter strategy has handed the advantage to Sony who can now sit back and cherry pick the best games to have graced the Xbox 360, reinvigorate them with exclusive content and stunning visuals and deliver them to PS3 adopters keen to play only the best of what the competition has to offer. By filtering the wheat from a fair amount of 360 chaff the PS3 can hit the shelves with better versions of games like *Oblivion* and EA's *Fight Night Round 3*.

If you check the tale of the tape on this game what PS3 gamers will be getting is more *Fight Night Round 3.5* than a simple port from Microsoft's machine as this boasts photorealistic boxers and all new features. Get In The Ring mode changes the traditional side-on, third person perspective to a first-person view, designed to show off the damage model and make those haymakers feel twice as devastating.

Whilst you're throwing fists you'll quickly realise it's not all one-way traffic and depending on what type of punch you get caught with you'll suffer ear ringing, restricted vision and light blurring. So when playing in first-person if your right eye takes a shot the corresponding side of the screen will gradually begin to get darker and eventually blur completely making it all the harder to see where the next punch is coming from. Add extra modes like Get In The Ring with the ESPN update system and stunning new venues and it's clear that *Fight Night* PS3 will be the undisputed champion of the console world. Now let's get ready to rumble... or should that be tilt?

For all the latest details on Fight Night's new feature be sure to check out the next issue of Next3 when we'll be calling seconds out on EA's big hitter.

If the left hook didn't get him the overpowering stench of BO certainly would.

Get up you son of a bitch 'cos Mickey loves ya.

Q&A

JULIAN EGGEBRECHT

We speak to the man behind Lair and the next generation of fire-breathing dragons

INFORM
Name: JULIAN EGGEBRECHT
Company: FACTOR 5
Role: PRESIDENT & CREATIVE DIRECTOR

Please give us three words that best describe your game.
■ Visceral. beautiful. action.

What makes your game truly of the next-generation?
■ Everything – the 1080p graphics and 7.1 sound are absolutely next-gen, the seamless transition from flight to ground in a huge world is next-gen, thousands of AI creatures and soldiers are next-gen, the physics, including cloth and fluid dynamics are next-gen, and finally, the motion control and gesture recognition is absolutely a new generation.

What challenges did you face in the making of a game for Sony's new system?
■ It's extremely cool and the PS3 certainly had its share of challenges – simply by being the most powerful game platform ever created.

Can you give us one OMG moment from the game?
■ Coming over the ridge above the main city, Asylia, seeing hundreds of buildings being attacked by hundreds of boats, dragons, and thousands of soldiers while the sun is setting over the Ocean. That's next-gen.

What part of the game makes you cry with frustration?
■ The development time and budget!

What inspired you to include PlayStation 3 tilt pad functionality in *Lair* and can you describe how it's used in the game?
■ Just imagine dashing forward by slamming the controller forward. Imagine attacking by smashing the controller towards your enemy. It's a whole new world of interaction.

The PS3 enables epic environments in terms of both size and content. How have you taken advantage of this in *Lair*?
■ Get close up fighting a dragon, land on the ground and eat soldiers, or shoot fireballs in mid-flight. Nothing comes even close in terms of epic scale.

The demo we played seemed more strategy-based than we were expecting; what balance has been struck between action, adventure and dragon combat?
■ The way it ties all together is via the morale of your troops, that you influence by your actions. Sometimes you help them directly by defeating enemies which threaten them, sometimes you boost morale indirectly by fulfilling goals far away from the larger battle.

Everyone seems to be talking about the PS3 and micro transactions; how do you feel about the prospect of downloadable extra content?
■ It will allow gamers to buy the things they really want – faster, cheaper, and more convenient. How we will take advantage of these options in *Lair* will be seen, but there certainly will be some downloadable content after the release.

How is your game going to change the world?
■ People will begin to believe in dragons as real creatures!

newsgrid

MAPPING OUT THE MONTH'S NEWS ON GRAPH PAPER. BECAUSE WE CAN

GOOD, BAD, EXPECTED, UNEXPECTED – LET'S PUT THE NEWS IN CONTEXT!

GOOD

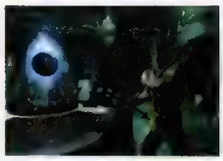
BAD

UNEXPECTED

EXPECTED

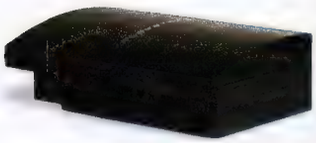
ONE FOR A MILLION

The PS3 isn't even out yet and it's already selling for record amounts. One dubious eBay auction saw a Playstation 3 pre-order go for a million dollars. Looks like Bill Gates will go to any lengths to size up the competition.



OBLIVION CONFIRMED FOR PS3

PC and Xbox 360 RPG *Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion* was finally confirmed as a PS3 launch title this month. And as if the game wasn't big enough already we'll be getting extra content not featured in the original version.



NEW 20GB PS3

Gain a HDMI port, lose some money off the asking price – that's a win-win in our book. Okay, so the price cut is limited to Japan at the moment, but it certainly bodes well for a future European reduction sooner rather than later. Plus, it's got the Japanese loving PS3 again – result.

SONY SELLS OUT

PlayStation pre-order campaigns kicked off in the US but are closed within minutes due to the strength of demand. Looks like all that mud-slinging hasn't done too much to quash the US gamer's lust for all things Playstation.

POSSIBLE MAY DELAY

Reports that Sony president Ken Kutaragi recently hinted that supply problems for Japan and North America could force the European PS3 launch to be delayed until May 2007. Sony have issued a statement saying it has no plans to modify its European launch plans 'at this time.'

ONLINE IS OUT

Following last month's news that the PS3 version of *Tony Hawk's Project 8* was to ship without online modes, Sega has confirmed that *Virtua Tennis 3* will take to the court without online versus play. Feel free to insert your own 'you can't be serious' response here.

Versus!

Best conqueror of the world?

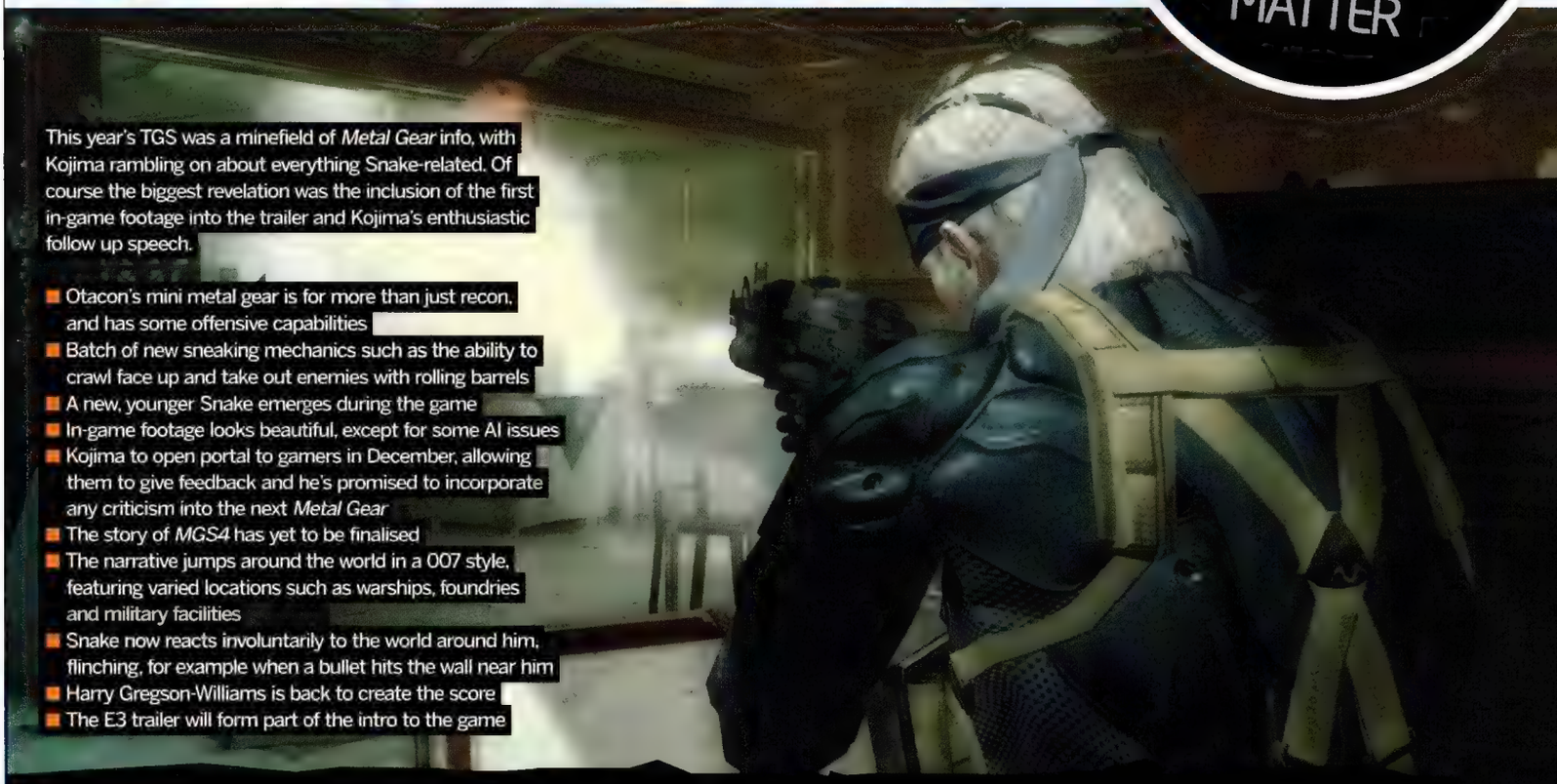
CRYPTO

Maniacal laughter	8	7	**Maniacal laughter**
Being a wholly unpleasant alien being gets Crypto off to a good start here			While Bill is perhaps less obvious with his evilness, we're sure he practices his hand-wringing and psychotic pacing in his über-futuristic lair
Evil plots	7	5	**Evil plots**
With an array of otherworldly gadgets and devices we've all seen what Crypto is capable of			Assaulting the world with the Xbox 360 is probably evil enough for the master of Microsoft. No more...please...
Army of goons	8	7	**Army of goons**
An entire race of similarly evil aliens is nothing to be sniffed at, and these aren't the kind to just keel over when they get a sniffle			An almost endless army of Xbox fanboys may not be all that intimidating, but those forum flames really can burn
Motivational rallies	7	4	**Motivational rallies**
You can't really go wrong with a persuade-a-tron in your pocket, can you? Hypnotising your audience isn't exactly fair but heck, if it works, it works, right?			Gates has never been much of a public speaker, but his propaganda machine will be running overtime in the background (unless it runs on Windows of course)
Flag	6	3	**Flag**
The Furon home world has a wonderfully descriptive flag. It's a fiery red background with a lush, verdant planet in the middle, surrounded by a small circle of burning planet. Nice that			Having the Microsoft logo splashed across everything isn't exactly awe-inspiring is it? Gates might be better off with something a little more traditional, like a big black fist on a red background.
OVERALL	36	26	**OVERALL**

BILL GATES

the next3 Gen

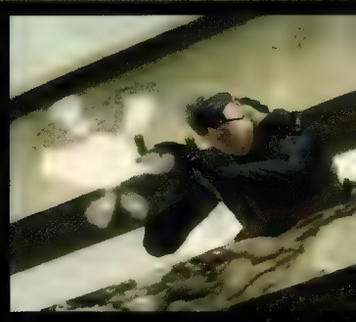
ALL THE LATEST NEW SHOTS AND INFORMATION ON THE GAMES THAT REALLY MATTER

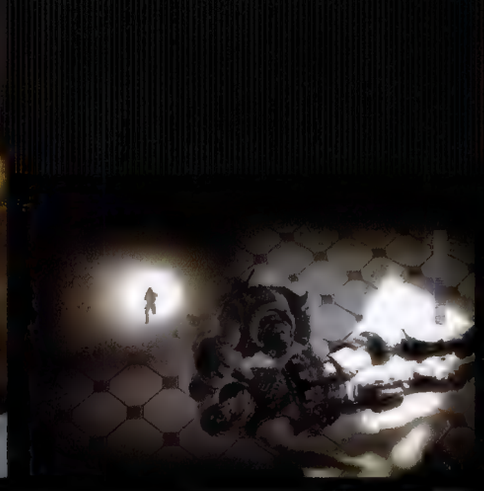


This year's TGS was a minefield of *Metal Gear* info, with Kojima rambling on about everything Snake-related. Of course the biggest revelation was the inclusion of the first in-game footage into the trailer and Kojima's enthusiastic follow up speech.

- Otacon's mini metal gear is for more than just recon, and has some offensive capabilities
- Batch of new sneaking mechanics such as the ability to crawl face up and take out enemies with rolling barrels
- A new, younger Snake emerges during the game
- In-game footage looks beautiful, except for some AI issues
- Kojima to open portal to gamers in December, allowing them to give feedback and he's promised to incorporate any criticism into the next *Metal Gear*
- The story of *MGS4* has yet to be finalised
- The narrative jumps around the world in a 007 style, featuring varied locations such as warships, foundries and military facilities
- Snake now reacts involuntarily to the world around him, flinching, for example when a bullet hits the wall near him
- Harry Gregson-Williams is back to create the score
- The E3 trailer will form part of the intro to the game

1//METAL GEAR SOLID 4: GUNS OF THE PATRIOTS





3// ARMY OF TWO

These new screens of *Army Of Two* show a surprising range of gameplay mechanics and environments ranging from bombed out abodes to tankers and caverns.

- Back to back combat
- Unique upgradable weaponry
- Firm focus on co-operative play
- Keep each other alive with live-saving mini-games and propping up your injured friend

2// ASSASSIN'S CREED

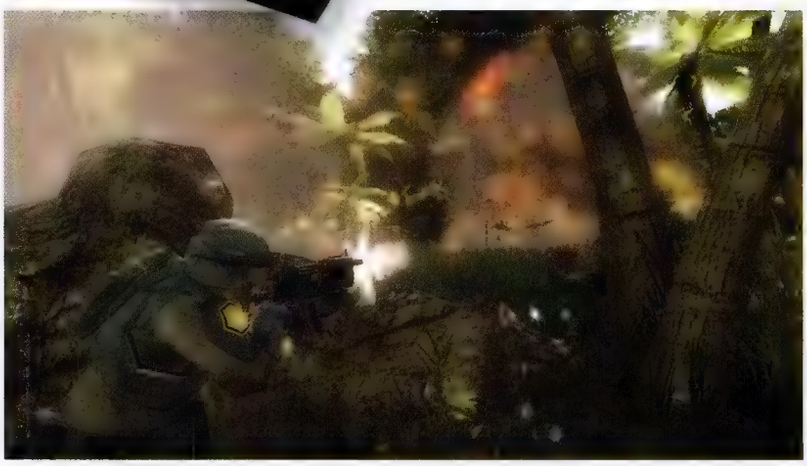
An interview with Jade Raymond, the foxy vixen heading up the *Assassin's Creed* team, revealed a whole bunch of new and tasty nuggets of information about Ubisoft's upcoming stealth-'em-up. Clarifying the controls and hinting at the online aspect, these new snippets of news make *Assassin's Creed* that much juicier.

- 'Puppet string' controls assigning a button to various limbs
- Varying degrees of strength applied using the right analogue trigger
- Altair has to feel for hand and footholds just like real climbing
- Missions include exploration, eavesdropping and pick-pocketing as well as murder
- Early suggestions of a multi-player co-op mode
- Loads of 'ambitious' downloadable content

Helping you plan your gaming future

next3 releases

Find out when all the big Playstation 3 games are coming to a store



March 2007

Bladestorm: The Hundred Years War	Omega Force
Blazing Angels: SOWWII	Ubisoft
Brothers In Arms Hell's Highway	Ubisoft
Call Of Duty 3	Treyarch
Coded Arms: Assault	Konami
The Darkness	Seabreeze
Enchanted Arms	From Software
Everybody's Golf	Sony
Fatal Inertia	Koei
F.E.A.R.	Day 1 Studios
Full Auto 2: Battlelines	Pseudo Interactive
Formula One 2006	Liverpool Studios
Half-Life 2	Valve
Heavenly Sword	Ninja Theory
Hellboy	Konami
Genji: Days Of The Blade	Game Republic
Madden NFL 07	EA Tiburon
Marvel: Ultimate Alliance	Raven Software
Medal Of Honor: Airborne	EA
Mobile Suit Gundam: Crossfire	Namco Bandai
Monster Madness	Artificial Studios
MotorStorm	Evolution Studios
NBA Live 07	EA Canada
Need For Speed: Carbon	EA Canada
Pro Evolution Soccer 2007	Konami
Rainbow Six Vegas	Ubisoft Montreal
Resistance: Fall Of Man	insomniac Games
Sega Rally	Sega Driving Studio
SingStar	Sony
Sonic The Hedgehog	Sonic Team
Stranglehold	Midway
Tiger Woods PGA Tour 07	EA
Tony Hawk's Project 8	Neversoft
Unreal Tournament 2007	Epic Games

2 sense

Summing up games to the power of two

Tekken 6
Kung Pow

Monster Madness
Graveyard Smash

Burnout 5
Road Kill

The Wheelman
Wheely Bin

Stranglehold
Tea Party

Indiana Jones
Whipping Boy

Devil May Cry 4
Dante's Inferno

Mercenaries 2
U 2

Getaway
Hash Brownies

Genji 2
Giant Crab

Untold Legends: Dark kingdom	SOE
Virtua Fighter 5	Sega-AM2
Virtua Tennis 3	Sega-AM2
World Snooker Championship 2007	Blade
Ridge Racer 7	Namco Bandai
FIFA	EA Canada
Gran Turismo HD	Polyphony
Lair	Factor 5
Armored Core 4	From Software
Rayman Raving Rabbids	Ubisoft
Sega Golf Club	Sega
Splinter Cell: Double Agent	Ubisoft
Ninja Gaiden Sigma	Tecmo

April 2007

Alone In The Dark	Eden Studios
Assassin's Creed	Ubisoft Montreal
Colin McRae: DIRT	Codemasters
Elveon	10tacle Studios

May 2007

Avalon	Climax
Mercenaries 2: World In Flames	Pandemic

June 2007

WarHawk	Icognito
Spider-Man 3	Activision
Afrika	Sony
Battlefield: Bad Company	EA
Def Jam	EA Chicago
Devil May Cry 4	Capcom

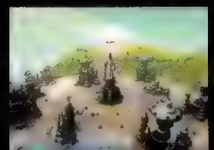
NB All release dates correct at time of going to press. Release dates subject to change without notice.

Wanted on PS3

Here's one we'd like to see on our side of the fence sooner rather than later

Spore (PC)

Will 'The Sims' Wright's latest project is ambitious to say the least. You (being a god) take control of life on a planet from its very beginnings. You then influence and develop that primitive life all the way through evolution to intelligence, civilisation, and finally to war with other planets.



next3team

WHO'S WAITING FOR WHAT...

EDITOR IN CHIEF
NICK JONES

MOST WANTED
METAL GEAR SOLID 4
DEVIL MAY CRY 4
RESIDENT EVIL 5
ASSASSIN'S CREED
HEAVENLY SWORD

ART EDITOR
JAMES DAVIES

MOST WANTED
PRO EVO 7
UNREAL 2007
GTA IV
MOTORSTORM
WARHAWK

ASSOCIATE EDITOR
KEITH HENNESSEY

MOST WANTED
DEVIL MAY CRY 4
VIRTUA TENNIS 3
LAIR
RESISTANCE: FALL OF MAN
HEAVENLY SWORD

Key game Liable to slip Could be dodgy

es

near you

The Eye Of Judgement	Sony
Fifth Phantom Saga	Sega
Ni-Oh	Koei
Romance Of The Three Kingdoms	Koei
The Wheelman	Midway

July 2007

Army Of Two	EA Montreal
Frontlines: Fuel Of War	Kaos Studios
The Outsider	Frontier
TNA Wrestling	Midway
Unknown Realms	Game Republic
Untitled	Naughty Dog

August 2007

Golden Axe	Secret Level
Haze	Free Radical
House Of The Dead 4	Sega
NBA Street	EA Canada
Parabellum	Acony Games
Stuntman 2	Paradigm Entertainment
Turok	Propaganda Games
WarDevil: Enigma	Digi-Guys

September 2007

Clive Barker's Jericho	Codemasters
Resident Evil 5	Capcom
Tekken 6	Namco Bandai
Burnout 5	Criterion
The Club	Bizarre Creations
Dirty Harry	The Collective
Eyedentify	Sony
Forbidden Siren 2	Sony
Indiana Jones	LucasArts
Metro 2033: The Last Refuge	4A-Games
Project Offset	Offset Software
The Wall	Burut Software

October 2007

Grand Theft Auto IV	Rockstar North
Call Of Duty: Modern Warfare	Infinity Ward
Fall Of Liberty	Codemasters
Getaway	London Studio
Monster Hunter 3	Capcom

November 2007

WWE SmackDown Vs Raw	Yuke's
Afterburner	Sega-AM2
Dynasty Warriors	Omega Force
Eight Days	Sony
Interstellar Marines	Zero Point Software

December 2007

Killing Day	Ubisoft
Killzone	Guerilla

February 2008

Kuriyama	Grasshopper

March 2008

Final Fantasy XIII	Square Enix

next3 Essentials

Plan ahead for PS3's essential...

Sports Games

1 Pro Evolution Soccer 7
Okay, so it hasn't been announced, but it's an Xmas dead cert

2 Virtua Tennis 3
So good, it could even supplant *PES* as our favourite lunchtime game

3 Fight Night Round 3
EA's brilliant boxing game looks even better on PS3 than it did on 360

4 Madden NFL 07
Football egg-shaped-ball style should be a launch highlight.

5 Tiger Woods PGA Tour 07
Another banker from EA, this time with Tiger's face motion-captured!

YOUR TOP TEN

Join our forum and vote for your most wanted PS3 games www.next3.com/forum

ASSASSIN'S CREED
GTA IV
RESIDENT EVIL 5
METAL GEAR SOLID 4
RESISTANCE: FALL OF MAN
DEVIL MAY CRY 4
HAZE
MOTORSTORM
FINAL FANTASY XIII
GRAN TURISMO HD

STAFF WRITER
TOM LECLERC

MOST WANTED
ASSASSIN'S CREED
THE DARKNESS
METAL GEAR SOLID 4
DEVIL MAY CRY 4
CIPHER COMPLEX

STAFF WRITER
CRAIG GILMORE

MOST WANTED
METAL GEAR SOLID 4
THE DARKNESS
HEAVENLY SWORD
RESIDENT EVIL 5
CLIVE BARKER'S JERICHO

SUB EDITOR
SARAH SLEE

MOST WANTED
LEGO BATMAN
BURNOUT 5
FIGHT NIGHT ROUND 3
TONY HAWK'S PROJECT 8
GTA IV

nextmedia SPECIAL REPORT

Microtransactions could mean big money

IT'S A MICRO ADVENTURE

ONE OF THE biggest PS3 boat-rockers last month was the revelation that Polyphony's hotly anticipated racer *Gran Turismo HD* is to be split into two separate games known as *Gran Turismo HD Premium* and *HD Classic*. The differences between the two are significant in terms of both quality and content. The *Classic* version will have the 'quantity' side of the equation covered with over 750 cars, 51 tracks and all of the assets in the game optimised for high-definition. The *Premium* version boasts the 'quality' with beautifully modelled machines on stunningly realistic tracks composed of tens of thousands of polygons. However, as you might expect, if you want quality you have to pay for it – and pay you will. Out of the box *HD Premium* will only feature 30 cars and two tracks, additional content will have to be purchased separately via a series of microtransactions which could make for one pricey game.

No pricing plans have been announced for any of the items that will be available nor exactly how many download options there will be, but the move does raise a very interesting point not only for the fate of *GT5* but also for the future of all PS3 games. Is this a sign of things to come with games coming as bare-bones packages that you can create and customise to your own specifications (and at your own expense) or is it merely an experiment designed to test the water. Of course, a system of microtransactions has been in place on systems such as Xbox Live for some time offering extra content for a nominal fee, but nothing on this scale has been attempted – and with the rumoured price of a download set to be around 50p, is there a good reason for that? It might not seem like a lot taken at face value, but with hardcore fans no doubt wanting every download available it could cause the price of a single game to skyrocket.

While we're sure that, upon hearing the news many will see the microtransactions model as just a money-spinning scheme on behalf of publishers to give you less and charge you more, but it can also be viewed as a huge step towards the personalisation of videogames. The game can be a blank canvas giving you the opportunity to pick and choose your own content, taking *GT* as an example, you can choose the car classes, tracks and tuning tools

MULTI-MEDIA MICROS

Games are only a small part of Sony's download model so what else will be available?

Blu-ray: Film trailers and even full movie downloads will be possible soon.

Music: New chart tracks for custom soundtracks or to blare through your speakers.

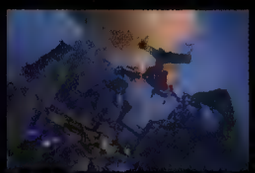
GamerPics: We hope we get the opportunity to personalise our online profiles.

PSP: Much of the content you pay to download on your PS3 can be transferred to PSP.

LIGHTS, CAMERA, TRANSACTION

What could other PS3 games offer as microtransactions?

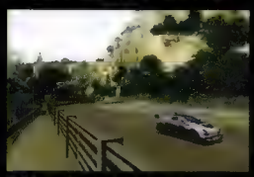
SingStar – Music tracks and videos. Also, for the egotistical of you, user vids.



WarHawk – New planes and guns, as well as multi-player and single-player maps.

Resistance: Fall Of Man – Extra guns, multiplayer maps and modes

Virtua Fighter 5 – New custom packs and characters, live video of the best fights.



Ridge Racer 7 – Cars, courses, improved AI and music tracks. Could also include user-customised cars.

FIFA/Pro Evo – Players, managers, classic teams, replica kits and maybe even seasonal updates.

White Knight Story – More spells, extra missions, horse armour (officially the worst ever download ever).

Army Of Two – Additional co-op missions, guns and modes as well as all the ususal multi-player maps.

you want in the game, not ones dictated by the development team. This would ensure that almost no two versions of the same game are identical – you can choose to buy as many or as few items as you like. As a precursor to such an announcement, a few months back Phil Harrison gave his utopian vision of what you might expect: "Imagine *Gran Turismo* shipping on a disc with one car and one track. And then you can browse, online, a dynamic circuit of vehicles that's growing every day because either the car manufacturers are adding new vehicles or we're adding new vehicles. And you can see a specific-type car that's being called up and say, 'I think I'll play with that one. Let me download and play it." Now, we're not totally blinkered, and understand that you don 't want to go forking out over 50 notes for a game with little to no content forcing you to spend out more and more money to create your game, but this system could well help tackle the issue of spiralling next-gen development cost thus reducing the price of the your initial purchase and you making up the difference with downloadable content.

Of course, until price plans are announced we can only speculate on the situation, but if we take the likes of Xbox Live as a template then microtransactions won't stop at additional game content with rumours already emerging that downloadable demos will come at a small cost – and then there's the potential cost of music, movies, gamerpics and retro downloads.

These extras are all point to the fact that not only will your PS3 be commanding all of your attention, but also a good chunk of your cash. The next generation of console gaming is ushering in a great many changes, but the system of microtransactions is undoubtedly one of the most important giving you the ability to expand not only your games but also your entire entertainment world with new content giving you a potentially limitless level of choice. The next step has to be expansion packs and episodic content, which can bulk up a game considerably and is a prospect that excites people in all corners of the industry. We spoke to Rob Loftus, senior producer of *F.E.A.R.* recently and he believes that downloadable content could well be the way forward for next-gen games: "I think it's the logical step for some of the larger products, I'd love to do it, but it depends what Sony does it terms of its online network."

Obviously *F.E.A.R.* is already a well established game, but the prospect of being able to splash out a pound or two for a hulking new gun or multiplayer map certainly makes sense. The system is already up and running on Xbox Live with Microsoft charging a mixture of money and Microsoft Points for the pleasure, and now with the *GT* announcement it appears as if Sony is preparing to go one step further with PS3. Speaking exclusively to *Next3*, *Gran Turismo HD* Product Manager Mark Bowles asserted: "Our main aim at the moment is to give the consumers choice and the ability to build the game as they want to play it rather than offering a prescribed journey through it."

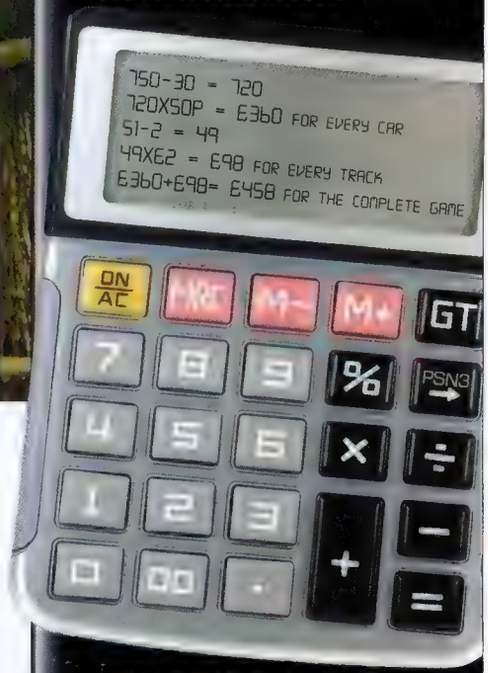
Whether the move succeeds or not is of course down to cash, plenty of bad feeling has already been stirred up due of the machine's high price point, so to charge the earth for base games and downloads would be to commit system suicide. We don't want to have to download a new football every time we kick it into the crowd in *Pro Evo* or buy a new plane every time we wipe out in *WarHawk*, but all we can do is wait and hope that Sony has a system in place that will offer an equal level of both value and choice or else these microtransactions could become a major issue.

Our main aim is to give the consumers the ability to build the game as they want to play it

A 'Gran' don't come for free

QUALITY COMES AT A PREMIUM

Gran Turismo HD Premium features only 30 cars and two tracks, so what will the game cost if you decide to recreate the Classic game in all its glory? Extra cars are rumoured to cost around 50p a piece and new courses around £2 so let's do the maths:



If such a system is used, the complete copy of the game could cost gamers almost £500 and that's without factoring in what Sony will charge for the game in the first place. But let's not get carried away as we're sure Sony isn't as naive as to think gamers are willing to pay out more on a game than they are on the console itself. We predict it has a plan more cunning than a fox who's just eaten an extra large helping of cunning pie, one that sees its games released as full-priced titles but with a built in download system that allows access to extra content equal to the game's retail price. We can but speculate at what the model might be but this sounds like a solution that would keep everyone (relatively) happy.

How much would you be willing to pay for a game? £40? £60? £458?!?

Pushing the plunger with the weight of opinion

How to IMPORT A PS3

OKAY, so it appears we haven't recovered from the delay news after all – what with the growing number of UK consumers now looking to import a PS3 from the US or Japan. It seems some people just can't wait to get their hands on Sony's interactive opus, but with 400,000 units shipping to North America and only 100,000 to Japan, the odds are extremely low. So we've put together this guide to aid you in the process. There are many trials and tribulations involved in importing a PS3 from overseas but hopefully, if you want it that much, you'll find our tips helpful.

The first place you're likely to check are auction sites – but we'd advise you not to. Sites like eBay will have a field day charging extortionate prices and as of writing this, people are selling their pre-orders in excess of £2,000 (already eclipsing the equally bonkers 360 launch). To be fair, if you expected anything less than inflated prices for imports or pre-orders, you might be best waiting until March. But if you couldn't possibly wait and are willing to fork out an arm and a leg and don't mind paying considerably more than retail, give eBay a look.

Perhaps the most fundamental factor of importing a console like the PS3 is the guarantee: it'll be void as soon it reaches our shores. Sony UK won't touch a console that was bought from the US – so if any problems persist with those initial batches, sending the unit back to and from the US won't be cheap.

A couple of smaller aspects must be considered too: 200V NTSC units won't be available for a long time, so you will need to buy a stepdown converter from anywhere in the region of 30 to 60 pound. Imported PS3s also won't play PAL PSone and PS2 games. Backwards compatibility is restricted by PAL and NTSC formats. Furthermore, imported PS3s won't pass the safety and compliance regulations required by Sony Computer Entertainment Europe, meaning SCEE cannot guarantee safe usage of the console.

For those wanting to experience the sheer graphical majesty of the system, consider what kind of television you own. If you own a CRT, problems could arise with the PS3 displaying its NTSC 60Hz picture. PAL is 50Hz in this country, whereas the US and Japan share NTSC. So importing a PS3 could spell problems for you if you don't own a TV that supports the format. Newer CRTs have been created with NTSC functionality, but it all depends on how new your TV actually is. However, if you own a HDTV there's nothing

Though the chance to import might be higher than it is this month, Christmas could mean higher prices

IMPORT THIS!
DIFFERENT WAYS TO GET A-HOLD OF A PS3 BEFORE XMAS

Using the Internet

LIK-SANG

Lik-sang offers pre-orders that are not binding and can be cancelled at any time. No prices have been posted yet but you will be notified with a confirmation email as soon as they do. Depending on the release schedule you will receive a 20Gb or 60Gb PS3. The best thing is: you won't have to pay a penny until the minute the console ships.

http://www.lik-sang.com

AUDIOCUBES

Sold out of pre-orders as of writing (but looking into accruing more), Audiocubes is charging $200 more than the retail price - and that's just for the 20Gb version. No 60Gb in sight. The website received 150 pre-order units and sold out in the space of two days, so it's probably best to check the site periodically.

http://www.audiocubes.com/

EBAY

We have little doubt this will be the first place people will check, but we recommend it only as a last resort. Many people will be looking to buy PS3s only to sell on eBay for considerably more than their retail price. If you want to help these people earn a little extra cash, eBay could be your ticket to next-generation goodness.

http://www.ebay.co.uk

Fly to Japan

Should you absolutely positively demand a PS3 around the Japanese launch, consider this:

RETURN FLIGHT TO JAPAN: £545.10
THREE NIGHTS IN RIHGA ROYAL SAKAI HOTEL: £132.00
SPENDING MONEY: £100
20GB PS2: £224.44
RESISTANCE AND GENJI: £53.85

Total Cost: £1055.39

Fly to the US

If you can wait a couple of days, and are still interested in flying overseas you could try this:

RETURN FLIGHT TO THE US: £263.10
FOUR NIGHTS IN PHEONIX PARK HOTEL: £273.01
SPENDING MONEY: £100
60GB PS3: £322.50
RESISTANCE AND GENJI: £64.62

Total Cost: £1023.23

to worry about – hi-def displays the same on all HDTVs. Speaking of region codes, anyone wishing to watch Blu-ray DVDs on their imported PS3 needs to understand that while the games are region-free, Blu-ray isn't. You'll have to purchase your films from overseas, which could be a bit of a hassle. Websites like Play.com and Amazon.com offer overseas delivery but shipping charges factor into a number of their products. You would have the benefit of certain films being released in the US first, mind you.

Of course, waiting until December for more units sounds like a good strategy. Unfortunately, though the chance to import might be higher than it is this month, Christmas could mean importers charge higher prices. But we understand that isn't going to matter to some people, so we hope you keep these pages bookmarked – if only to be weary of the many pitfalls awaiting prospective PS3 importers.

UK Importers

URBAN-LUX

As of writing this Urban-Lux has 40 PS3 units available – half of them 60Gb, and half 20Gb. The former retails at £500 exactly including VAT and will cost £12 to ship anywhere in the UK. For anywhere in Europe the price is £20. The 20Gb unit retails for £380 - with the same price for shipping. Sounds too good to be true.

Tel: 01202 549678
www.urban-lux.com

VIDEO GAME CENTRE

Although specific prices aren't known as of writing this, Video Game Centre intends to get as many units as possible from Japan. Prices and cost of shipping/postage will become available closer to the time - but this is one store definitely worth keeping your eye on.

Tel: 01202 527314
www.videogamecentre.co.uk

TwitchGaming

Thoughts, imaginings and opinion from Next3s resident columnist, Twitch

DelayStation

Is this a blessing?

ANYBODY ELSE still pissed off about Microsoft's Xbox 360 launch? That's a pretty bizarre question, I know, but it's also an interesting one – at least to me. Like many people, I went to great lengths to get an Xbox 360 last year – in the end I shelled out £400 on a certain popular auction site for a premium unit. That's over a hundred pound more for what has so far become, I'm sorry to admit, a rather lacklustre machine.

But the thing that irritates me the most is that Microsoft made such a colossal blunder with the launch. Forget some of the atrocious games for a second (which, when thinking strictly of *Perfect Dark Zero*, is a bloody hard thing to do) and concentrate on the console itself: a limited number of units, buggy as all hell and much noisier than I would have liked. There were reports of those three red lights of doom showing up on brand new, straight-out-of-the-box 360s, disks being scratched and power bricks burning people's skin off. It was a debacle. But what's worse is that I can't forget such things, no matter how hard I try.

I recently reconnected to Xbox Live – and, no, you can't have my Gamertag. I was perusing my sizeable shelf of Xbox 360 titles, looking for something I could jump online with and just obliterate weak folk. But as I viewed such wonderful games as *Condemned*, *Oblivion*, *Hitman: Blood Money*, *Table Tennis*, *Dead Rising*, *Battlefield 2* and so on, my mind wandered back to the launch – it always wanders back to the launch. Irrespective of whatever game I'm playing and whether I'm enjoying it, when I press that power button and put my disk in the tray I'm usually thinking of the lengths I went to just to get my hands on something that hasn't satisfied me nearly as much as it should. Something I could, in retrospect, have waited a year for. And that makes me very sad.

I want you to understand, the reason I'm telling you this is not because this is a Playstation 3 magazine and I want to take a shot at Microsoft, no, rather it's because Sony is hitting all the wrong marks that Microsoft did. And yet here's a crazy thought: I reckon the Playstation 3 delay is a bloody good thing! I also think that us Europeans are actually getting the better deal in the long run. Now, before you grab your BMXs and bow-and-arrows and attempt to stage a drive-by on *Next3* magazine, I want you to stop and think about it for a moment.

Microsoft successfully orchestrated a worldwide launch last year, but it did so at the expense of the very machine it was selling. As I type this I'm still waiting for a replacement Xbox 360 because the disk drive on mine keeps freezing when I leave it open for a couple of seconds. Annoying because it means I have to close it manually. For Sony, Playstation 3 problems might well persist for US and Japanese owners buying their consoles this month – but come March, the chances of this happening to you and I will be considerably lower.

Then there's the games to consider: *F.E.A.R.*, *Call Of Duty 3*, *Resistance: Fall Of Man*, *Rainbow Six Vegas*, *Ridge Racer 7*, *Tony Hawk's Project 8*, and so on – much better than some of the fluff Microsoft threw at us. Once again, that isn't some condemnation of Microsoft, it's more the memory I have of only two or three must-have games at the launch of Xbox 360 (I went from December until March playing only *Project Gotham Racing 3* and *Condemned*, because those were the two games that appealed to me the most).

What saddens me more than anything however, is the number of people tripping over themselves to get their hands on a Playstation 3 this month – as though the extra four-month wait is akin to asking them not to breathe. Call me crazy, but I don't actually find the opportunity to buy an imported system – which might have a couple of kinks under the bonnet, no support from SCEE, expensive shipping charges, an online component that won't work without an American credit card/address and Blu-ray DVDs I have to import from America – at all appealing. Sorry.

What I do find appealing is the console delay. I may be alone in this, but I honestly think it's a blessing in disguise. By delaying Playstation 3 until March, I'm likely to forever remember the moment I bought my PS3 – and that will be with a faultless launch line-up and fewer risks for the machine. So stop complaining about Sony hating European consumers and join in the hype... again.

Twitch

twitch@imagine-publishing.co.uk

The building blocks of videogame culture

- **Written by gamers for gamers**
- **Unbiased professional opinions**
- **The UK's biggest videogame magazine**
- **Over 65 pages of the latest previews and reviews**
- **Massive section dedicated to Retro games every month**

ISSUE 50 ON SALE 2 NOVEMBER

The multi award-winning MULTIFORMAT magazine – available from all good newsagents or call for a copy direct on 0870 442 1097

Backwards to the Future

It's true that PS3 will be released with PS2 hardware built inside – but only initially. This will no doubt up the cost of production, which is why Sony's only doing it for as long as it needs to. Once Sony's tech heads have created the right software emulation tools, any further units will ship without the built-in PS2. From that point, gamers will go online to download a firmware upgrade – or, if they don't have internet access, have it sent to them from Sony – that enables PSone and PS2 games to play as well as previously. Sony could easily have released PS3 with these emulation tools in place of the PS2 hardware, and just updated them as and when it saw fit, but Microsoft did that and we're all aware of the problems there. Instead, Sony is giving us a console with very few backwards compatibility problems from launch, as it continues to work on software that isn't broken.

We say very few as there's still the problem of Technical Requirements Checklists (TRCs), and which PSone and PS2 games follow those requirements. TRC's facilitate the backwards compatibility function and are supposed to appear in all PSone and PS2 games – but not all titles appear to have included them. "Either it's accidental or on purpose; there's actually a lot of games that don't follow the TRC," Kutaragi has said. It's believed that the earlier quote from Tom Reeves was in relation to the games Kutaragi speaks of – the ones that don't include the TRC. Should any problems persist, Sony can work to address them by releasing an update via its PlayStation Network Platform. This sounds an awful lot like the situation Microsoft is in, but it isn't really the case. As we mentioned earlier, Microsoft has to work with two different pieces of hardware between Xbox and 360, complicating things. Sony has the benefit of working with hardware that isn't terribly different.

On the one hand, including the PS2 hardware from the slimline PlayStation 2 (essentially the Emotion Engine – or PS2 CPU – and graphics synthesizer) means there shouldn't be too many problems for backwards compatibility. It also gives Sony the time to make sure the emulation software is the best it can be before it's released. On the other hand however, merely sticking the software into the PS3 casts doubt on what sort of visual upgrades we can expect from previous-gen games running on the console. PSone titles ran directly through the PSone chip that was directly linked to the PS2's graphics synthesizer, meaning a certain amount of visual upgrade. Of course, upscaling will feature – taking the native 480p picture and bumping it up to either 720p or 1080p – though we aren't sure if that will happen straight out of the box or through a firmware upgrade downloaded through

10 CULT CLASSIC PLAYSTATION 2 GAMES

[01] SHADOW OF MEMORIES

From the producer of the *Silent Hill* games, this murder-mystery features no combat, an engrossing plot and lots and lots of time travel. Genuinely awesome.

[02] TWIN CALIBRE

Completely on-rails, but completely gory. Both analogue nubs controlled your arms meaning dual-wielding was a must and looked really cool. Very gung ho, very fun.

[03] PSYCHONAUTS

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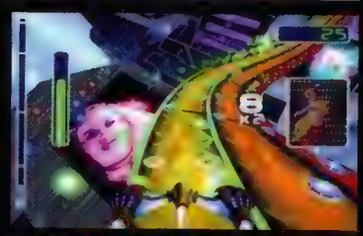

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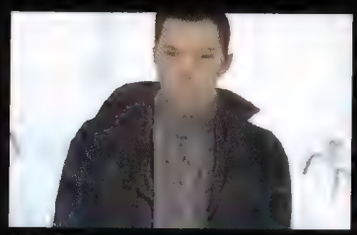

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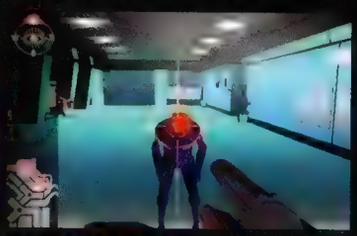

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10 PLAYSTATION GAMES WELL WORTH PLAYING AGAIN

[01] METAL GEAR SOLID

Easily the best *Metal Gear* to date and with a story as prescient and topical today as it was back in 1998. Genuinely exceptional gaming.

[02] FINAL FANTASY VII

Even if you already know about Aeris (spoiler: she dies), it's worth replaying what has become the pinnacle of the *Final Fantasy* series.

[03] RESIDENT EVIL 2

More ambitious and scary than the original and featuring the different scenario choices, *RE2* is easily the best of the PSone bunch.

[04] SILENT HILL

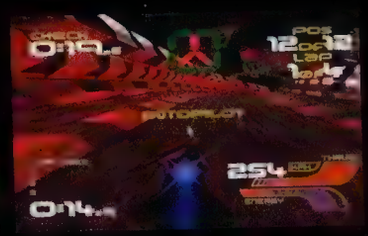
Strangely, the lesser PSone graphics lend *Silent Hill* a much more visceral angle than before. It's also worth replaying for the Lisa Garland bit alone.

[05] GRAN TURISMO 2

The premier racing simulation series. Despite the masses ogling over *Gran Turismo 4* and *HD*, *GT2* is still well worth picking up and ploughing through again.

[06] ALIEN RESURRECTION

Forget the inferior movie and instead bask in this brilliant FPS. A terrifyingly convincing world of Xenomorphs, facehuggers and killer smiles.



[07] WIPEOUT 2097

2097 was the best PSone game in the series despite some odd quirks (you could only play two-player on a link cable). Hopefully on PS3 this won't matter.

[08] THPS

Once again, returning to *Tony Hawk* is a good idea before *Project 8* is released – if only to see the raw elements that would appear throughout all the games.

[09] SOUL BLADE

Overshadowed by its admittedly brilliant sequel, *Soul Calibur* remains an awesome fighting game - and one of the first to let combatants wield weapons.

[10] TEKKEN

You have to play *Tekken* to see where it all started. That and because it also holds up surprisingly well in today's next-generation climate.

more. Instead you could just pop the PSone game straight into PS2, and then go down to Game to trade-in the older console.

Another facet of PS2's appeal was that it shipped with an inexpensive DVD player. This, coupled with backwards compatibility helped PlayStation 2 rocket to the top and stay there last generation. Thanks to Blu-ray and further backwards compatibility, it's clear Sony wants to emulate the same success with Playstation 3.

Despite the fact that Sony has already proven adept at handling this, Microsoft's more than tumultuous efforts to get various Xbox games running on 360 has certainly brought out the cynics. Sure, 360 has different hardware to Xbox, and emulation is therefore complicated, but people have still begun to question Ken Kutaragi's claims that all PSone and PS2 games will be one hundred per cent backwards compatible with Playstation 3.

You too may doubt the claim, but one thing you can't deny is Sony's desire to get it right and, most importantly, problem free. In a recent interview with Electronic News, Tim Reeves, vice president of semiconductor and technology services at IBM, asserted: "Sony is very concerned about quality and backward compatibility. They want to get this right. They tested game after game after game. When there were about 40 PSone games that didn't work properly: that didn't pass their criteria for quality." That aim to get it absolutely right must warm the hearts of the cynical crowd... or not. You see, despite it's intentions Sony does face problems with backwards compatibility.

The reason PS2 was so effective at running PSone games was that both consoles shared the same chip for their main processor. PSone games would therefore play effortlessly on the system, with little else needed on Sony's part. To a degree, PSone games received a facelift, but had the two consoles shared different hardware things would no doubt have been different. Much like it is for PS3 right now.

The confusion that's surfaced these past months, regarding how Sony was to implement backwards compatibility hasn't helped. Early reports stated the machine would not include PS2 hardware built into the PS3 spec, and that software emulation was the strategy Sony was using. A subsidiary of Sony in the UK was apparently tackling this – as well as working on the PlayStation Network Platform – reportedly since Kutaragi aired his claims. But, unsurprisingly, more conflicting information appeared revealing Sony is instead sticking its slimline CPU and rasterizer hardware into the PS3 architecture. So, what the hell is Sony doing here? How is backwards compatibility going to work? Is it through hardware or software? The answer is: both.

10 CULT CLASSIC PLAYSTATION 2 GAMES

It's true that PS3 will be released with PS2 hardware built inside – but only initially. This will no doubt up the cost of production, which is why Sony's only doing it for as long as it needs to. Once Sony's tech heads have created the right software emulation tools, any further units will ship without the built-in PS2. From that point, gamers will go online to download a firmware upgrade – or, if they don't have internet access, have it sent to them from Sony – that enables PSone and PS2 games to play as well as previously. Sony could easily have released PS3 with these emulation tools in place of the PS2 hardware, and just updated them as and when it saw fit, but Microsoft did that and we're all aware of the problems there. Instead, Sony is giving us a console with very few backwards compatibility problems from launch, as it continues to work on software that isn't broken.

We say very few as there's still the problem of Technical Requirements Checklists (TRCs), and which PSone and PS2 games follow those requirements. TRC's facilitate the backwards compatibility function and are supposed to appear in all PSone and PS2 games – but not all titles appear to have included them. "Either it's accidental or on purpose; there's actually a lot of games that don't follow the TRC," Kutaragi has said. It's believed that the earlier quote from Tom Reeves was in relation to the games Kutaragi speaks of – the ones that don't include the TRC. Should any problems persist, Sony can work to address them by releasing an update via its PlayStation Network Platform. This sounds an awful lot like the situation Microsoft is in, but it isn't really the case. As we mentioned earlier, Microsoft has to work with two different pieces of hardware between Xbox and 360, complicating things. Sony has the benefit of working with hardware that isn't terribly different.

On the one hand, including the PS2 hardware from the slimline PlayStation 2 (essentially the Emotion Engine – or PS2 CPU – and graphics synthesizer) means there shouldn't be too many problems for backwards compatibility. It also gives Sony the time to make sure the emulation software is the best it can be before it's released. On the other hand however, merely sticking the software into the PS3 casts doubt on what sort of visual upgrades we can expect from previous-gen games running on the console. PSone titles ran directly through the PSone chip that was directly linked to the PS2's graphics synthesizer, meaning a certain amount of visual upgrade. Of course, upscaling will feature – taking the native 480p picture and bumping it up to either 720p or 1080p – though we aren't sure if that will happen straight out of the box or through a firmware upgrade downloaded through

[01] SHADOW OF MEMORIES

From the producer of the *Silent Hill* games, this murder mystery features no combat, an engrossing plot and lots of hints of time travel. Genuinely awesome.

[02] TWIN CALIBRE

Completely on-rails, but completely gory. Both analogue nubs controlled your arms meaning dual-wielding was a must and looked really cool. Very gung ho, very fun.

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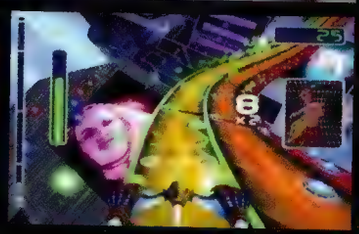

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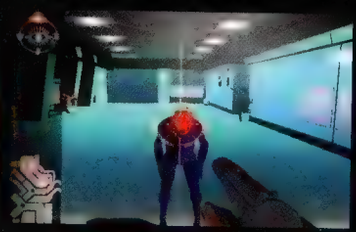

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10 CULT CLASSIC PLAYSTATION GAMES

[01] FINAL FANTASY TACTICS

Unreleased in this country, *Tactics* is a different beast to other *Final Fantasy* games – but nonetheless brilliant. Hopefully it's still easy to find.

[02] BISHI BASHI SPECIAL

Like *WarioWare* but on PSone, *Bishi Bashi Special* is full of amazingly fun mini-games. Imagine Channel 4's *Banzai* but in videogame form.

[03] SILENT BOMBER

As the oxymoronic title implies, *Silent Bomber* is all about planting bombs silently and blowing the enemy androids up. Very original and equally addictive.

[04] FINAL FANTASY ANTHOLOGY

PSone remakes of *Final Fantasy V* and *VI*, packaged together in one box.

[05] SYMPHONY OF THE NIGHT

Despite being mauled at the time of its release for being a 2D platform game, *Symphony Of The Night* has become the most popular game in the franchise.

[06] VANDAL HEARTS

This Konami title was the first strategy role-playing game released on the PSone, and has since managed to garner quite a following.

[07] VAGRANT STORY

One of Squaresoft's oft overlooked gems, it was eclipsed at the time by other Square RPG releases, and is a darker, more mature title. It's also stunning.

[08] POINT BLANK

This was a lightgun game aimed specifically at a younger audience, with dozens of funny mini-games to entertain the player.

[09] VIB RIBBON

Vib is a thin white stick bunny, placed against a black background. He navigates levels influenced by the songs on your hard drive. Genuinely innovative.

[10] INCREDIBLE CRISIS

A truly whacked-out experience, *Incredible Crisis* concerns itself with an unfortunate family and the mini-games that surround their mental ordeals.

the PSNP. Beyond upscaling though, who knows what to expect?

One aspect of backwards compatibility that likely won't get a visual upgrade but is nonetheless welcome, is Mega Drive and TurboGrafx games through Sony's e-Distribution network. As we're sure you know, Mega Drive was also known as Sega Genesis and was the company's most successful console. If Ken Kutaragi is to be believed, Sony has partnered with Sega in an effort to bring its back catalogue of games – which is thousands – to Playstation 3. Once downloaded, friends will be able to swap games back and forth and, hopefully, play them online.

As we've already reported in this issue, the news was revealed during Kutaragi's keynote TGS speech but has since been refuted by Sega. We wouldn't usually put stock in something like this, especially after Sega's statement, but Sega is allowing Sony to release *Sega Genesis Collection* for PlayStation 2 and PSP. The pack includes 30 well-known titles including *Sonic The Hedgehog*, *Eco The Dolphin*, *Alex The Kidd*, *Golden Axe* and several from the *Phantasy Star* series, as well as a host of extra features such as interviews with developers and a massive museum of game facts. Sega may not be handling the game directly – it's put together by Backbone Entertainment – but it adds credence to Kutaragi's claims.

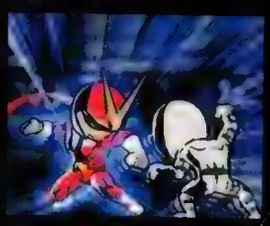
There's no reason why it shouldn't happen. After all, Nintendo has entered a similar agreement with Sega to use games through Wii's Virtual Console, described by Nintendo as iTunes for videogames. As well as Mega Drive games, the Virtual Console can also run NES, SNES, Nintendo 64 and PC Engine (TurboGrafx 16). It's only been announced in Japan for now, but we wouldn't be at all surprised if it made it over to the UK as well. With the price structure of PS3 demos standing at $1 a pop, you can bet Mega Drive games will come somewhere in the region of $5 to $15 – contrary to popular belief, we can't see Sony ripping gamers off with games as old as Mega Drive ones. Besides, *Next3* would happily hand over the bucks in exchange for *Speedball: Brutal Deluxe*, *Sonic The Hedgehog 2*, *Streets Of Rage 2* and obviously *Earthworm Jim*.

The TurboGrafx prospects are interesting, too. Some would say the system was doomed from the moment it saw release, as it went head-to-head with Nintendo's NES and Sega's Mega Drive. It also featured a somewhat ludicrous design that only had one controller port and required gamers to buy a peripheral that could enable multiplayer, not to mention the lack of support from third-party developers and publishers, still, it has nonetheless endured a large cult following. Bringing its

GAMES THAT WILL LOOK EVEN BETTER UPSCALED

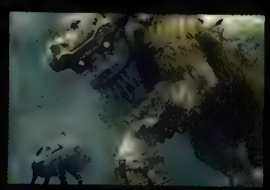
[01] OKAMI
One of the best looking games we've ever seen, irrespective of console. It should look even better upscaled on Playstation 3, with nary a jagged edge in sight.

[02] REZ
It's hard to find a copy anywhere unless you feel like shelling out on eBay, but some say it's worth it. We certainly would. Majestic and stunning to behold.



[03] VIEWTIFUL JOE
Alright, so it plays relatively worse than the GameCube version, but it's still immense fun and looks amazing. The art style would benefit greatly on PS3.

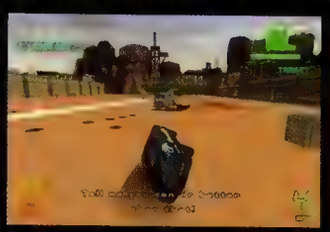
[04] KILLER7
killer7's gameplay has certainly divided gamers, but we're all in agreement on how bloody gorgeous it is. We imagine it would look even better upscaled.



[05] SHADOW OF THE COLOSSUS
Bit of an obvious choice, but how could we not mention it? Much more epic than *ICO* but with an equally impressive aesthetic style that is enough to floor gamers.

SO BAD THEY'RE WORTH A LOOK

[01] KISS PINBALL - *PSone*
Here's a good idea: a pinball game dedicated to KISS. Brilliant! Only this features two boards and absolutely no KISS songs whatsoever. Not brilliant.



[02] KNIGHTRIDER - *PS2*
Davilex is on this list twice for one reason: it's probably the worst developer ever. *Knightrider* the game doesn't even have The Hoff. For shame!

[03] RED NINJA - *PS2*
The best criticism of *Red Ninja* we found was that it's a comedy of errors without the humour. A ninja game where you essentially prostitute yourself is not cool.

[04] MIAMI VICE - *PS2*
Despite having one of the funniest dives we've seen in a game, this truly is Davilex's worst game to date. And that's saying something.

[05] SPICE WORLD *PSone*
A dodgy attempt at a rhythm-action game with horrible anime-like distortions of the beautiful girls. *Spice World* is almost as bad their music.

most revered games to PS3 will no doubt excite fans that have stuck with the console over the last decade, although we are intrigued to see how games from that era will look stretched to 720p.

This isn't a new area to consoles: Microsoft is already offering old games to download through Xbox Live, and we've already mentioned Nintendo's Virtual Console. It seems Sony is therefore playing catch-up, but at least it shows willingness on the firm's part to conform to the public's interest. And who knows – if Sega does give Sony access to its back catalogue, perhaps Midway and EA will follow suit? Retro games are an important part of the industry for some people – reminding them of halcyon days gone by, and laying signposts that highlight how the medium has adapted and changed over the years. That's also true for PSone and PS2 as there are still tons of games worth playing on the system (we've highlighted a selection in the various boxouts dotted about the pages for your edification), and many you will want to keep. This is especially true for PSP owners: Sony announced that very soon you will be able to download PSone games through the PSNP and transfer them to your PSP.

So is backwards compatibility important? Well, of course it is. Speaking on a purely practical level, it's a godsend for the average gamers who don't want to stuff their attics, basements or, as the case may be, the space under their beds with copious old console boxes and peripherals. And on that note, just ask yourself why the SIXAXIS controller looks almost exactly the same as the DualShock. The answer: Sony is not lazy. It's like that because it would be harder to acclimatise to playing something like *Metal Gear Solid* or *Resident Evil 2* on that dodgy boomerang controller.

Obviously, many people do enjoy keeping their older consoles, perhaps for purely nostalgic reasons. But the truth is that the average gamer will gladly trade their previous-generation console in for the price of a whole Playstation 3 game. We've certainly done it, and – we're sure the average gamer will agree – we've come to regret it in time. Thanks to PS3, that won't ever be the case with Sony games. How can we not be grateful?

08/12/06

PS3 Publisher//Sony Dev... al Genre//Racing Players//1-4
Website//http://www... e//Q2 2007

A truly gran day out

Gran Turismo HD

GRAN TURISMO HAS always been an unusual beast having defied videogame logic from day one. Despite lacking all but the most rudimentary AI and any semblance of damage modelling, it's managed to draw interest from much of the gaming populous, selling over 45 million copies in its decade or so in existence. The range of cars has always been deceptively small, featuring a huge amount of near identical versions of the same motor, and consistently favouring oriental cars over Western ones *GT* should, by rights, make it a pretty lame franchise. Sure, there will be many a gamer out there who remembers the frustration of just imagining how wonderful damage modelling would be on the first two iterations, but what really annoyed was the ability – due to the lack of realistic damage physics – to use other cars as barriers to nudge your way forward in the pack. Thinking about it, you'd have to say that as a racing game *Gran Turismo* simply fails. So few races were balanced enough to genuinely enjoy; all too often we've been left either storming away with the lead thanks to an overpowered car, or languishing at the back due to a financial oversight leaving you unable to buy the right tyres.

There never seemed to be much excitement to derive from the inclusion of other racers on the tracks, and even the more extreme situations rarely brought about any real thrills as the cars seldom reacted to crashes in a realistic fashion. So how on earth did Kazunori Yamauchi's driving simulator get to the point of selling such numbers – a total that equates, if trivia is your thing, to over four copies each for every man, woman and child in Portugal, imagine that! Yes, the more extreme physics have always been a bit ropey, and there have certainly been better racers in terms of intensity, but what these other titles lacked was the absolute, painstaking attention to detail and the kind of realism, with each successive iteration, that blew the competition out of the water. For the first time cars performed differently. Tweaks made to the set-up affected them in a genuine way. Adding more downforce didn't just make your car feel sticky, and having the right tyres did more than just decrease your sideways movement around corners. Like it said on the box.

Polyphony is embarking on something that will require just as much effort as traditional development
GRAN TURISMO
MAHLE
MICHELIN
Audi France
DB NEWS

A History Of GT

A decade of real driving simulation.

Gran Turismo *(1998) PSONE*

11 courses and almost 180 cars, this was a truly mindblowing title at the time. Far and away the most realistic and exhaustive racer videogaming had ever seen. The closest we had come to a real driving simulator by 1998 was *Hard Drivin'*, which says it all really.

Gran Turismo 2 *(1999) PSONE*

A two-disc release a couple of years later, *GT2* upped the ante with over double the cars and tracks. The first licensed track to be used, Laguna Seca, was featured in this version, and as an 'interesting' side note, the North American version had a rather nasty garage-erasing bug that was responsible for more than a few smashed controllers, PSones and smaller siblings.

Gran Turismo 3: A-Spec *(2001) PS2*

The first iteration to hit PS2, *A-Spec's* increased visual demands meant a decrease in the number of cars available, falling from around 650 to 150. Cars could be modified for racing, and downforce added to increase motor sexiness.

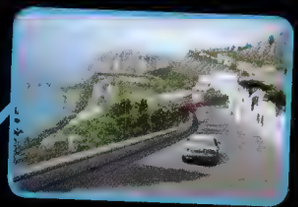
Gran Turismo Concepts *(2002) PS2*

Three concept versions of *GT* appeared around the summer of 2002, namely 2001 Tokyo Collection, 2002 Tokyo-Seoul and 2002 Tokyo-Geneva. The only real additions this time around were a total of 65 new cars, a documentary and the appearance of Hyundai as a new manufacturer.

Gran Turismo Prologue *(2003) PS2*

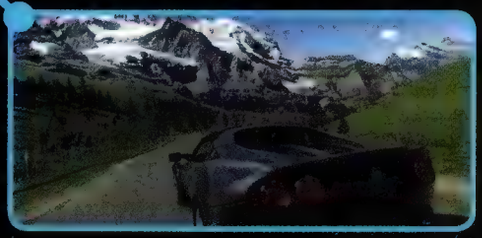
Very much a stopgap measure until a full *GT4* appeared, *Prologue's* budget 2003 appearance didn't really feel like a game as such. A mish-mash of licence style trials and an interactive advert for Toyota's Hybrid Synergy Drive.

Gran Turismo 4 *(2004) PS2*



Having promised an online mode around the time of *Prologue's* release, the arrival of *GT4* was not only late, but also disappointing for those looking forward to a proper PS2 online experience. With over 720 vehicles and 50 plus tracks however, it stands as the most complete racing sim, running in 1080i - quite an achievement on PS2.

Gran Turismo HD *(2007 PS3*



The arrival of *GTHD* sees the first foray into the world of true high-definition gaming. Outputting at 60fps in 1920x1080p from a technological point of view at least, it has to be considered as one of the best-looking videogames ever created. This aesthetic appeal is furthered by the inclusion of Ferrari to the line-up of over 80 manufacturers, leaving only Porsche and Lamborghini out of the high-performance loop.

CONTINUATION //

Gran Turismo was the real driving simulator. The appeal was there in front of us, *Gran Turismo* has never been about racing, it's all about the driving.

It's a little different now, with the advent of high-definition visuals and immense next-gen processing grunt, as everyone and their development dog are trying to eke out the most from PS3, even at this early stage. Polyphony has to do something different to appeal to us, but judging from both past experience and what we've uncovered about this newest version, *Gran Turismo HD*, it looks like Polyphony is going to surpass itself. Again.

Is it really that long ago that we first heard about this hyper-realistic racer? Has it been a whole ten years since we first heard of Kazunori Yamauchi and his little outfit Polyphony? Have we moved on so much that the prospect of a new *Gran Turismo* fails to excite anywhere near as much? If we're honest, probably yes, but that says

Publishers will have free rein to release unfinished titles in the knowledge that they can be patched to oblivion post release

This kind of focusing technique could well feature in the Replay and Photo modes?

more about us than it does *Gran Turismo*. We're bloody hard to please.

So what is this 'extra' we speak of? What should make *GTHD* – comparatively speaking – as stimulating a prospect as the earlier games in the series? After all, PS3 is a fledgling piece of technology, and one that will quickly outgrow any visual clothing created for it now, high def or otherwise. Even at the early stages of development *GTHD* looked amazing, and it just keeps getting better but Kazunori can't rely on sexy visuals to sell his wares any more. We've been baying for additions from the series' inception. Damage modelling, better AI, decent crash physics and an online mode are aspects that all contemporary racers need, simple fact. So, given *Gran Turismo*'s past omission of all these things, how many can we expect to see in *GTHD*? Well, we've been promised all of them, although not in the way you might think.

You'll need to know a little about microtransactions before we continue, and if you've read our special report on page 36-37, you'll be pretty much au fait with the idea, but if you're the kind of nutter that starts reading a magazine from the back here are some things you'll want to know about the future of gaming. Despite the current HD-DVD vs Blu-ray debate, by 2016, when PS4 is dominating the console scene, we won't be buying discs. Hell, we won't even be using money by then, we'll be living in a utopian society with a cashless credit/barter system we suspect. Anyway, discs are heading down the long, lonely road to dereliction, and by way of an early tester, *GTHD* will be at the forefront of the technological battle to replace them.

Microtransactions are Sony's weapon in this behind-the-scenes war. Essentially, this boils down to buying a game, most probably for a significantly lower price than we currently expect, and customising it with hundreds of little downloads. Of course there's plenty of room for abuse here as publishers will be free to release unfinished titles in the knowledge that they can be patched to oblivion post

FOCUS ON MANUFACTURERS

FERARRI

BEST CAR? 599 GTB

Why? Er... not only does it look horribly, devilishly sexy, but with 620hp produced by its six-litre engine, we're betting it goes like your proverbial turd off a trowel, offering up just 2.6kg per horsepower. As if any further claim to fame were needed, it's the most powerful V12-engined production car of all time. Indeed, the 5,999cc engine is derived directly from the Enzo Ferrari Supercar. The inclusion of Ferrari in this iteration of *Gran Turismo* signifies an important step forward for Yamauchi and his boys, which will undoubtedly up the popularity of this seminal series.

FOCUS ON MANUFACTURERS

LOTUS

BEST CAR? Lotus Elise 111 R

Why? Small, light and ever so sassy, the 111 R is the kind of vehicle that often gets overlooked. With a comparatively hefty price tag, Lotuses often deliver little value for money under the bonnet in *Gran Turismo*, but this beauty is a great little all-rounder.

Gran Turismo HD Shop

Shop 'til you drop.

AI // *Gran Turismo* has never been famed for fantastic AI, indeed it's one of those lamentably lacking aspects of the game. The fact that any sensible AI will have to be downloaded post release is perhaps recognition that it's an aspect that has been overlooked somewhat in the past.

CARS // Weighing in at ¥50-100 (25-45p) a piece, the cars are arguably the most important - and lucrative - download. Our concern is that with many models being incredibly similar, we could be getting rinsed 20 times over for the same vehicle. That said, we're all intelligent folk and hopefully won't get into the slippery downward spiral of completism.

TRACKS // These should cost anywhere between ¥200-500 (90p-£2.25) and while we're guessing that they'll probably weigh in at around a fiver when *GT* hits Europe, the effort that goes into every one of those courses is pretty special. Yamauchi is likely to be adding some little extra Easter eggs and novelties to the courses as well if past efforts are anything to go by.

DAMAGE MODELLING // Much like the AI, damage modelling has been lacking in the series from day one. We're a little skeptical about whether this will actually see the light of day, but it'll certainly reinvigorate interest in the ageing racing sim if it does come along.

DECALS/BODY PARTS/DRIVERS // There will most likely be an awful lot more a bit further down the line when we get a little bored of new tracks and cars, but whether these will involve gameplay downloads like short cuts or race modes is a different matter. Cosmetic adjustments are more likely with the odd new skin, driver or rims.

Even at the early stages of development GTHD looked amazing

The detail here is astonishing. Look at the reflections on the cars

FOCUS ON MANUFACTURERS

SUBARU

BEST CAR? Impreza WRX STI Spec C Type RA

Why? A 2001 version of the hugely popular import vehicle, this Subaru benefits from a lighter chassis and increased torque through increased efficiency through the turbocharger and exhaust. Always a favourite mid to top-range motor in the game, *GT* helped boost import sales of high-end Subarus to the States.

//

release. Increased overall cost is another factor with early estimations of *GTHD*'s total cost coming in at almost £500. All that aside, the idea is sound, creating a win-win situation for developers and publishers who can afford to take a few more risks, and consumers who get a completely customisable product.

GTHD is jumping in at the deep end with this system, offering over well over 700 cars and 50 courses as well as 4,500 other assorted items. Of course, these mini downloads haven't been created yet, so with *GTHD* you're paying for potential. Sort of. We say sort of because what you're actually getting with *GTHD* is two games in one. Were *GTHD* a one-trick pony, we'd have a few reservations about the value of such a purchase on day one. Why purchase a title that's less enjoyable the earlier you buy it? No, what you're getting with *GTHD* is 'GT Premium' and 'GT Classic'. While there's been a little confusion over which is which, from day one Premium will offer a meagre 30 cars and two tracks while Classic essentially recreates *GT4* in glorious high definition, giving you the entire PS2 game with souped-up visuals. Both will feature downloads, but only Classic will allow you to get online and go up against petrol-heads around the globe, organise online competitions and build your community of like-minded racers. There will be all manner of online extras including chat, time trials and a ranking system that will get your competitive juices flowing.

It's not only the inclusion of a second, albeit similar, game that's piquing our interest, but also the knowledge that bikes are set to make an appearance. With *Tourist Trophy* out there, but not quite up there in terms of physics and race thrills, what can we expect from the two-wheeled addition to *GTHD*? In all honesty, given just how secretive Polyphony is being about the bikes, we can surmise one of two things. Either a visually enhanced but otherwise unadulterated version of *Tourist Trophy* will make its way into the game, or all the issues of the PS2 version are being ironed out as we write and have yet to be finalised. There's no mention of bikes in the official material for the game however, so there is a

You may be racing the most beautifully rendered cars ever made, but why are the drivers all the same?

possibility that they may not make it in time for the launch.

Similarly, the damage modelling is an element that hasn't been included from day one and even then the restrictions placed on Polyphony by vehicle manufacturers mean that there will be two grades of damage: one for race-type automobiles, and another, lower level of breakage for production cars. This is all a bit silly – we're all grown ups here after all – but we'd still take it over no damage modelling at all. Of course, with the intervention of car manufacturers, we'd have to expect any damage to the cars to be fairly lightweight – Colin McRae this is not. That said, whatever additions are made in the deformability of the cars are bound to make a significant change to the way we play *GT*.

Another gameplay aspect which has failed to worm its way into the launch version is some respectable AI. Pretty much every *GT* review we've read berates the series for pedestrian AI that neither reacts to offensive moves nor ever really tries to overtake properly. Indeed, much of the 'intelligence' involves your opponents following the same line around a track, regardless of other happenings on the road. We've been promised a degree of human behaviour with the later AI downloads though, which could turn the series on its head, adding genuine excitement to the mix of lavish visuals and authentic physics. The inclusion of AI will no doubt be a pivotal moment, not just for *GT*, but for the genre. Racing games are going to be measured not just in terms of *GT*'s visuals, but also up against a complete game.

Regardless of how great we expect *Gran Turismo* to be once the trimmings have been added and the platter served proper, we still have reservations about just how appropriate microtransactions are to this title. Fine, with each car supposedly taking six months' worth of man-hours to produce, if we were to wait for all the add-ons the release date would be nearer the END of PS3's life than the beginning. The problem we have is that we could be waiting a long time for all of this. Knowing Polphony's penchant for

FOCUS ON MANUFACTURERS

MITSUBISHI

BEST CAR? Lancer Evo 9 GSR

Why? Proven as one of the best cars both in the *Gran Turismo* and real worlds, the Lancer can easily pull 0-100kmph in less than five seconds. With a top end of around 250kmph you'd be hard pushed to find a motor with more torque, power and control than the Evo.

FOCUS ON MANUFACTURERS

MAZDA

BEST CAR? Roadster '89

Why? Cute, sassy and as good a starter car as you're likely to find, the roadster may not be up there with its more powerful cousins in terms of raw grunt under the bonnet, a skilled motorist can take the Roadster to numerous early victories.

FOCUS ON MANUFACTURERS

HONDA

BEST CAR? Honda Integra Type R

Why? Probably the finest front wheels around, the Integra doesn't have the raw, frothy-mouthed madness of some in its class, but it competes on pretty much every other plane . A respectable top end and a super-quick 0-100 acceleration has always made it a favourite for certain courses.

480i vs 720p vs 1080i vs 1080p

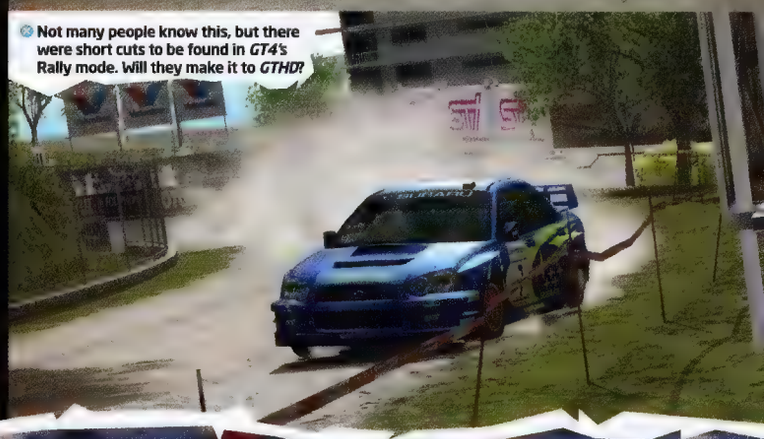
Now for the geeky bit. How do the different resolutions stack up against each other?

480i//The resolution of NTSC, and standard DVD resolution, 480i is what most of the pre-digital generation grew up with. Some of us are happy with it, but others have lost all interest in anything shown in this antiquated format.

720p//Standard HDTV resolution. The debate between 1080i and 720p rages however, with proponents including ABC, Fox and ESPN. Progressive displays the entire image in one pass, whereas 1080i does it in two passes.

1080i//Being an interlaced image, which is easier to broadcast due to staggered images, 1080i uses half the bandwidth of 1080p - the format that Sky chose to broadcast its HD service in.

1080p//The most supreme resolution available to us mortals, perfect for every application from movies to PS3 games. Only a few, very expensive, TVs can display this resolution.



Not many people know this, but there were short cuts to be found in *GT4*'s Rally mode. Will they make it to *GTHD*?

Knowing Polphony's penchant for perfectionism, a delay or two seems almost guaranteed

The crowds are among the most realistic we've seen, reacting to each car and cheering their favourites.

FOCUS ON MANUFACTURERS

TOYOTA

Best Car? Celica Rally Car '95

Why? The most iconic rally car, made famous by both *Sega Rally* and *Gran Turismo*. Often touted as the best all-round car in the game, the Celica is a gaming status symbol. Showing off online will be the equivalent of popping round your mates with one of these on your memory card.

FOCUS ON MANUFACTURERS

NISSAN

Best Car? Nissan Skyline GTR V Spec II

Why? Considered the best car in many versions of *Gran Turismo*, the Skyline has almost unlimited potential. With the right tweaking it can have the power of a rhino combined with the control of a gazelle. Modding one of these babies allows it to reach 300kmph within 13 seconds.

perfectionism, a delay or two seems almost guaranteed. If we're honest with you, we're even doubtful about some of these features making it to download at all. How annoyed would you be after six months still playing the same game you bought under the promise of new content, new gameplay and new challenges? We'd probably plump for 'very'.

Don't get us wrong, we're still hopeful about *Gran Turismo*'s microtransactions, and we're not expecting them to fail in their duties in terms of follow ups, but Polyphony is embarking on something that will require every bit as much effort as traditional development, and, much like a school child, the homework is rarely given in without the pressure of a deadline. But then that's the pessimist in us, and even if this is the first effort to incorporate this kind of software delivery system, Sony would have to be pretty silly to leave millions of *GT* fans with a sub-par product.

But it's not all about microtransactions, this is a game we're talking about here, and one you all know very well. It's common, even in the most obvious ports, for publishers to 'big up' an upcoming title and differentiate it from previous games as much as possible. Kazunori has done the exact opposite in citing just how similar *GT4* and *GTHD* are; on day one the only real difference will be a hike (albeit a massive one) in the quality of the visuals.

We have a question to ask of *Gran Turismo*, and it's undoubtedly the most important question we'll ask of a racer for a long while. We know it'll stand out as the most complete and realistic driving title for some time, we suspect that very few will challenge its dominance over the course of the PS3's life and, more than that we know that gamers out there will love it. We're seeing it in a different light though, and we'll want to know how worthwhile a purchase it'll be. We've all played *GT4* and what essentially boils down to a preview of a fully fledged *GT5* – a game we'll be expecting around this time in 2008. Packaged with a remake of the previous title it could look under nourished up against many other early Playstation 3 titles.

There's the other possibility however, *Gran Turismo* could well exceed expectations and deliver excellent value for money. The AI and damage modelling could come along quickly, cheaply and with the occasional upgrade, and prices could be kept to a minimum for it all. Given that this is the first endeavour to involve microtransactions, we can only hope that the process will go smoothly. We all know what *Gran Turismo* will be like on release, but what we can't say for sure is how it will develop, and that, more than anything, excites us.

%complete

10 | 20 | 30 | 40 | 50 | 60 | 70 | 80 | 90 | 100

PS3 **Publisher**// Capcom **Developer**// In-House **Genre**// Action-Adventure **Players**// 1
Website// www.capcom.co.jp/devil4 **Release Date**// TBA

We Dante need another hero... actually yes, yes we do

Devil May Cry 4

OF ALL the big PS3 games we're looking forward to playing next year, *Devil May Cry 4* has to be one of the biggest. The series is as synonymous with PlayStation as it is with amazing combat, a huge array of enemies and the wisecracking, overconfident coolness of its hero, Dante. And yet this time Capcom has decided to go all antonymous and instead of playing as Dante we'll all be cheering on a new hero called Nero. What in the good name of Sparda is going on?

Well, it was Sparda who started it all really. Before siring both Dante and Virgil, the Legendary Dark Knight was born into a war between the human world and the underworld, but he awoke to justice and set about defeating the underworld by himself with his favourite sword, eventually killing the devil Mundus and ensuring peace for two millennia. Some humans, obviously impressed and thankful of this, created a new religion to honour the Dark Knight. The Order of the Sword set up home in a city called Fortuna and charged itself with carrying on Sparda's work to rid the world of evil. The Order of the Sword is made up of holy knights, and one of their most prestigious members is Nero. Strangely though, he bears a striking resemblance to Dante with the same white hair, same wacky dress sense and even Dante's same swords-and-guns attitude to fighting. Could it be that he's a half brother or bastard child of a demon? Little is known about his heritage so far and we're unlikely to get a definite answer any time soon, especially as his world is about to fall apart.

Everything Nero knows and was brought up to believe in changes on the day he comes face to face with his God's own son, Dante. Not long after Nero's arm is injured by the mysterious force that eventually turns out to be his new Demon Fist, he sees Dante come crashing through the skylight of the organisation's church and start slaughtering the Order's guards. How can this be? Why is the son of the deity killing off his father's subjects?

It seems that Nero has something Dante wants, but Nero isn't going to give it up without one hell of a fight. It's probably that Demon Fist that has grafted itself on to Nero's arm. At this point, Nero doesn't know what it does or what it's for, all he knows is that he's heard a voice saying, 'I want more power!' Perhaps this is the voice of the demon possessing the fist, perhaps it'll eventually take over Nero himself, could it even be the last remnants of Mundus the sworn enemy of the Sparda clan? Perhaps Dante was keeping it safe until it somehow found it's way into Nero's hands, well... hand.

There are so many questions about the plot of *Devil May Cry 4*. Certainly most of them refer to Nero; he must be related to Dante in some way since he sports the same

Everything Nero knows and was brought up to believe in changes the day he comes face to face with his God's own son, Dante

Chronological Crying

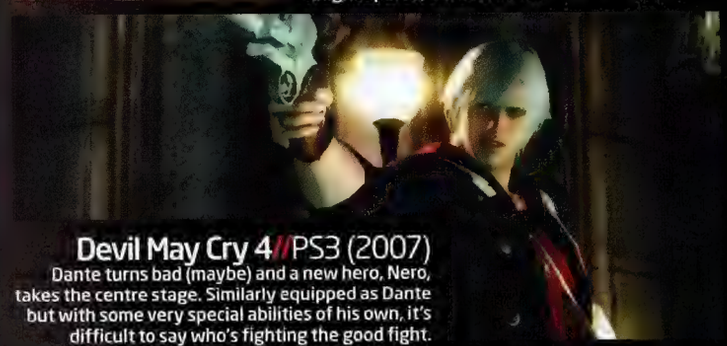
The DMC series has been split up in time. The plot goes as follows:

Devil May Cry 3: Dante's Awakening//PS2 (2005)

Cockier than he ever was in the original game, this younger Dante is being heavily tested by his twin brother Vergil in a tower magically erected in the city. He eventually reaches the top of the tower and discovers a few truths about his lineage.

Devil May Cry//PS2 (2001)

Dante arrives on Mallet Island in order to destroy Mundus who has been resurrected thousands of years after Dante's father, the Legendary Dark Knight Sparda, defeated him.



Devil May Cry 4//PS3 (2007)

Dante turns bad (maybe) and a new hero, Nero, takes the centre stage. Similarly equipped as Dante but with some very special abilities of his own, it's difficult to say who's fighting the good fight.

Devil May Cry 2//PS2 (2002)

Dante teams up with a girl named Lucia to fight the demons infesting Dumary Island and to defeat Arius, a man wishing to perform a ritual to gain the powers of an evil god, Argosax the Chaos.

Getting some good air is always a great idea when faced with that many enemies.

Yeah this must be Dante judging by the red coat. Nero sports a blue coat of similar length.

Nero looks a bit fresh- faced but you can't deny the similarities to Dante.

Right Handy

Nero's demon fist is not just for punching

While Nero is just as skilled as Dante in the whole swords and gunplay department he does have another trick up his sleeve, actually it sticks out of his sleeve as well. The Demon Fist he possesses acts a bit like the Beowulf Dante uses in *DMC3* and is capable of smacking enemies up into the air before battering them back down to the ground with such force the floor splits, making nearby enemies stagger. That's not all though, as he can perform a snatch move where the fist detaches from his arm and grabs far-away opponents by the head, it then teleports them back to Nero's location and you can then attack them close up. This will be very handy for increasing the combo counter and getting a good rating which is all important when you complete a level.

CONTINUATION//

look and fights in the same manner, the only difference being that instead of wielding two pistols he has only one. This shouldn't slow down his firepower though as it is a double-barrelled pistol and is capable of blasting foes and ripping enemies to shreds with just a few pulls of the trigger. It's fun to watch his foes twitching on the ground as more and more bullets pierce their flesh. Obviously Nero needs to have one hand free to make use of the Demon Fist which he utilises to greater effect than Dante ever did the flaming gloves called Ifrit. The 'Righty Handy' boxout is dedicated to the Fist so you can read more about it there, but it's still worth mentioning that Nero, like Dante, swings a sword with both hands, sacrificing the use of his fist for a few seconds. And what a sword it is. While throughout the previous *Devil May Cry* games he has used all kinds of weaponry, Dante always goes back to his favourite swords, but neither Alastor nor Rebillion had a throttle on them.

Yes a throttle. We've seen Nero, in the midst of fighting off demons, activate the throttle that makes up part of the sword's grip, he then stabs the sword into the chest of an enemy and takes off, sliding around the floor using the poor, unfortunate enemy like a skateboard. Dante performed a similar move in *DMC3* – yet again the similarities between these two characters are brought to the fore. But surely it's not just going to be for skating enemies around the screen. So far not much has been revealed about this new sword, called the Red Queen, but we're getting the impression that when the throttle is activated, Nero's swordplay and combo abilities will go through the roof, new moves will become available, and everything in Nero's path will be decimated.

Nero's moves are pretty much the same as Dante's, pressing X will make him jump high in the air, hammering away at O will fire his revolver and tapping away at triangle brings the sword out in order to hack away at the enemies. Like Dante, Nero has a few basic combos with the sword; they look slightly different but do pretty much the same thing. Pushing forward while attacking with the sword will launch Nero forward, but instead of just stabbing into the enemies like Dante does with the Stinger move, Nero uses a horizontal slash that knocks down multiple enemies, very handy for clearing a path and then selecting which target will be on the receiving end of a devastating combo. The High Time move is also different, instead of performing an uppercut with the sword, Nero actually kicks his foes into the air, and it's here that the juggle comboing begins. He can launch himself up after the enemy and slam them back down to the ground using his sword, or start shooting them while they're still in the air keeping them aloft with a hail of bullets. He can even bring the fist into play by grabbing them out of the air and driving them into the ground again. When this is done on multiple enemies, it's not long before those Nineties slang terms of encouragement begin lighting up. This time they are, 'Come On', 'Big Up', 'All That', and, if you've been killing at a ferocious rate, 'Slammin' Beat'. If there's a 'Don't go there, sister', and a 'Talk to the hand', level to get to we wouldn't be all that surprised.

Of course, all this comboing isn't just to look cool, even if it does. It's all about getting the decent combos in to get a plentiful supply of red orbs. These red orbs are the key to levelling-up Nero's skills, and since there is yet another weapon that needs new moves unlocking you're really going to have to be

Flaming Hell

It's like fighting Satan's mates

One of the bosses who has been on display is this thing. It's like some sort of demon from hell, armed with a massive sword, oh, and it's completely on fire. In one sequence we see Nero dwarfed by this blazing monstrosity as he tries to avoid not only the flaming sword but the fireballs the beast is throwing at him. The village where this battle takes place is set ablaze from the fire emanating from it and by the end of the fight it will more than likely be completely razed. Quite how Nero is supposed to fend off such a towering inferno of evil is a mystery at this point, but maybe he'll be able to get his hands on Dante's Cerberus weapon from *Devil May Cry 3*, which had the power to freeze things - that might just give him a slight advantage, well, maybe...

Still wearing his trademark red coat, though now he sporting some manly stubble.

CONTINUATION //

earning as many as you can to get even more destructive moves available. The green orbs return as well so Nero can get a bit of health back after taking a beating.

The playing style hasn't changed much, even with this game's new protagonist. If you've ever completed *Devil May Cry 3* and unlocked the video of the awesome combos that Dante can perform in that, and only then realised exactly how deep the combat mechanics went then we're sure you'll agree that changing it too much would be a bad thing. And no one likes bad things. Still, the fist will add even more depth for those that mastered all of Dante's weapon-changing combos in *DMC3*, and although it hasn't been seen yet, Capcom has said that Nero will be able to use two guns at some point. So, you can be pretty sure the different styles that Dante perfected, such as Gunslinger, Trickster and Swordmaster will return. New styles will be included no doubt, but we'd be foolish even to attempt to guess what they'll be – still, you can bet they'll be amazing.

Speaking of which, the new enemies appear even more strange and twisted than in the other *Devil May Cry* games. Previously Dante had his hands full with weird marionettes, shadowy devil dogs and all manner of huge bosses, but it seems that Nero will have his hands even fuller. In the early stages of the game he is set upon by what look like badly stitched rag dolls. Evil ones. You can tell they're evil – they have blades sticking out of them and as they spin and thrust, Nero runs the distinct risk of being dismembered. What's interesting about these dolls is their sheer variety. Traditional games just have different enemy classes, but these evil dolls have a huge variety of looks. There are some with what seem like potato sacks over their heads (perhaps a nod to Dr Salvador, or chainsaw bagman as he's sometimes known, in *Resident Evil 4*, another Capcom game), and some that are colourful although with any luck you won't be looking at them for long. Commanding Nero to pull them apart adds to the slaughter.

There haven't been too many other enemies revealed to date, which is a shame, but at least it'll provide some excitement and intrigue when you get to play the game. We sort of hope those damn witches with the huge shears don't make a return, they're horrible. Mind you, when facing off against that huge fire producing Balrog thing maybe a few witches won't seem so bad.

A good looking game, the detail that's gone into the background makes *Devil May Cry 4* look as fluid and as realistic as you'd expect. In one of the presentation videos at the Tokyo Game Show, where Nero was attacked by the Balrog, the whole village was set on fire, and as the timbers burned around him you could almost feel the heat. Or maybe we were just rather excited. When fighting, there are all sorts of incredible special effects firing off from both

Dante always goes back to his favourite swords, but neither Alastor nor Rebillion had a throttle on them

Good Fortuna

Nero's city is jaw dropping

While your eye is inevitably drawn to either Dante or Nero whenever they're on the screen, if you can try to look past them then you're in for yet another visual treat: the backgrounds. The city where most of *Devil May Cry 4* seems to be set, Fortuna, is incredibly easy on the eye. With its neo-gothic buildings, gardens with fountains gently sprinkling away, and benches that are clearly for sitting on while enjoying the view rather than juggling combos, this certainly gives the impression that this city has never experienced an attack of hell spawn before. Hopefully, most of it will remain intact throughout the game.

the swords and the gun, and even flashier ones from the Nero's right fist. The sword slashes leave behind massive trails of light which change depending on what move is being performed while the fist releases large explosions of energy whenever it grabs on to something, and even more when its finishing move is used. It is amazing to watch as all this is going on, it could even turn out to be one of those games that you'd quite happy sit and watch someone else play while you enjoy the action taking place on screen.

It has been suggested that *DMC* will be more difficult than the last game, which is a bit daunting – we doubt there was anybody who managed to kill Cerberus on their first go, heck it was still quite a challenge on Easy mode. And yet Capcom has also said that controlling Nero will be easy and intuitive, so hopefully a balance has been found since we even know people who were put off by that first boss fight in *DMC3* and didn't even try to get past it. We're not sure what they're going to think when they see that flaming boss, but, like most people, we can't wait to get a chance to hack it to pieces... somehow.

Devil May Cry won't be out until some time next year, but here's hoping it'll be a launch title for us in the UK. Until then, may we suggest returning to *Devil May Cry 3*, maybe even picking up the Special Edition (it's only £20 by the way) and polishing up your weapon combos and Royal Guard techniques. Something tells us you're going to be needing them.

The Demon Fist is brilliant for dragging enemies across the screen and to give them a good kicking

%complete

PS3 Publisher// Sony Developer// Namco Genre// Racing Players// 1-2 (2-16 online)
Website// www.namco-ch.net/ridgeracer7 Release Date// Autumn '07

Ridge Racer 7

Being driven round the bend isn't going to be an option

POINTLESSNESS is a wretched thing – worse still for those unaware of its presence. Tasks that intrigue, present challenge and generally provide some form of joy are held in far higher regard than those that display pointlessness, yet the pointless chores must still be undertaken by someone – strange, as there's never much point. That 'someone', in this case at least, is us. The chore in question? Well, it's this rather lengthy preview of *Ridge Racer 7*. Not 'pointless' in the sense that this piece of writing has no worth. Hell no. It's more to do with the fact that any title that turns up in the *Ridge Racer* series requires very little in the way of preview. Of course, it's been done anyway...

The page count for this particular piece stands at six. There have been many titles in the past that have demanded this amount of space and more, so the term 'lengthy' doesn't really fit as well as it should, but this latest *Ridge Racer* title actually requires a far smaller amount of space. The reasoning behind the swell is that the reputation and eager fan base essentially demands coverage. To stand on high, atop our magazine-shaped pedestal (more of a box, really) and claim that *Ridge Racer 7* is 'more of the same' would likely cause the PR-types overseeing the title to come swooping in with cracking whips of regret and fiery swords of death – it would also cause us to lie. There IS new on offer here. We're talking about a next-generation machine, people – it's ALL new, or so we're led to believe. Playstation 3 is a machine that's going to change our lives, after all. The obvious similarities that have swarmed about the series like a fairly generous and well-mannered plague, however, need to be addressed and, for the most part, applauded.

'Yes', we cheer. We cheer at the *Ridge Racer* series frequently. But it's

It's clear that Sony is going all-out this time – maybe aware that some may well deem it a necessary launch rather than one with a point

If You Build It...

Namco shows that looks could well be everything

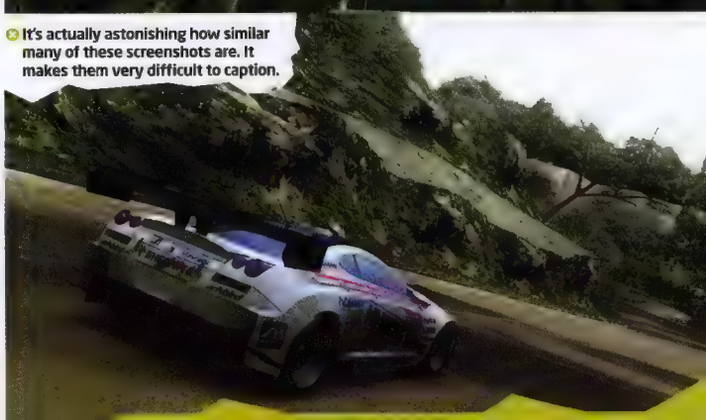
We've all seen customisable vehicles before - and they've even been known to turn up in this very series - but Namco has ensured that in *Ridge Racer 7* you can race closer to your own specifications than ever before. That's right, in this seventh instalment you can build cars however you want from scratch, choosing from a huge bundle of mechanical and cosmetic enhancements. It's reckoned that a total of over 375,000 parts will be available for the final game for you to play with and generally abuse. Of course, whether they'll all be contained on the disc is a mystery at this point. We certainly wouldn't be surprised if a large number of parts were only available via download and with micro-transactions playing a large role in exactly how pretty your vehicle looks as you roll it out to play online. Guess we'll just have to wait and see...

Namco has announced that it wants players to feel like they are playing online even when they aren't

not a cheer that's prompted by surprise. When we're surprised, we make more of an 'oooooh' noise that could never be mistaken for a cheer. Each time a Sony console launches, a *Ridge Racer* title arrives alongside it with a big 'I'm going to look awesome on your new console and will take ages to 100 per cent' grin spread across its nonexistent face – it's never a surprise. Actually, not never. Back in 1993 when the very first arcade machine was released (and after it had spent a good year wowing the rest of the country and was finally deemed out-of-date enough to be moved to one of the dilapidated Bournemouth arcades) we were surprised. We were surprised by a dose of arcade racing that made those who were always meant to race in the occasionally ill-thought-of Automatic mode drool and salivate as they waited for their next ride. Since then there have been many titles, and having experienced the near-complete demo that was made available at this year's TGS it will again come as no surprise that everything we've always liked about the franchise has successfully made it in – only this time it's looking better that ever.

It's one of the problems that are faced when dealing with next-generation games. Sony's push for visual excellence is a push that's going very well indeed, and there's a fair chance that if you were to flick through this very magazine – as you probably will as you hold it in your hands right now – words such as 'eye candy' and 'looks-wise' turn up far more frequently than they perhaps should, but this is sometimes necessary to attempt and relay the gorgeousness to those who aren't as fortunate as we are, and are yet to see the games in action. We've seen *Ridge Racer 7*, and it does look stunning – we promise not to mention the dazzling looks or the superb effects on show during a boost for the rest of this preview feature. Honest.

It's clear Sony is going all-out this time – maybe aware that some may deem it a necessary launch rather than one with a point. People may praise the *Burnout* series for its arcade-racer perfection, but when *Ridge Racer* arrives, we're sure there'll be a new king in town and it'll drift Criterion right off its throne. What we have here is a game that – at its core – has taken what has been successful in its forerunners (pretty much everything) and tweaked each element until it's just that little bit better. It's true, we are talking only a 'little better' here. The series has seen a lot of work over the many, many years it's been around, and while the early days may have seen great overhauls and corrected errors, the series has reached a point where it takes a huge amount of effort (not to mention the power of a next-generation system) just to see small improvements. The improvements are certainly there, but it's only the *Ridge Racer* connoisseurs who will really feel the difference in the way that things play out. To those a little less familiar with the running of things than the *Ridge Racing* elite, the smoothest, sharpest and most enjoyable title the series has had to offer could be on the way to you shortly.



It's actually astonishing how similar many of these screenshots are. It makes them very difficult to caption.

Keep Rolling

This latest game may have the number seven after it, but the *Ridge Racer* series has enjoyed success far more times than that over the last 13 years...

In The Arcade

Ridge Racer (1993)

The game that started it all. *Ridge Racer* wowed anyone who entered an arcade back in 1993 with its mix of 'real' car elements and arcade-style gameplay. Obviously Namco picked up on this popularity, as they decided to see how far they could take the franchise...

Ridge Racer Full Scale (1994)

Later in the year Namco re-released the *Ridge Racer* game into the arcades with a full-scale Eunos Roadster to sit in. It was awesome. You even had to turn the key in the ignition to start the game and all the dials worked. Jackpot.

Ridge Racer 2 (1994)

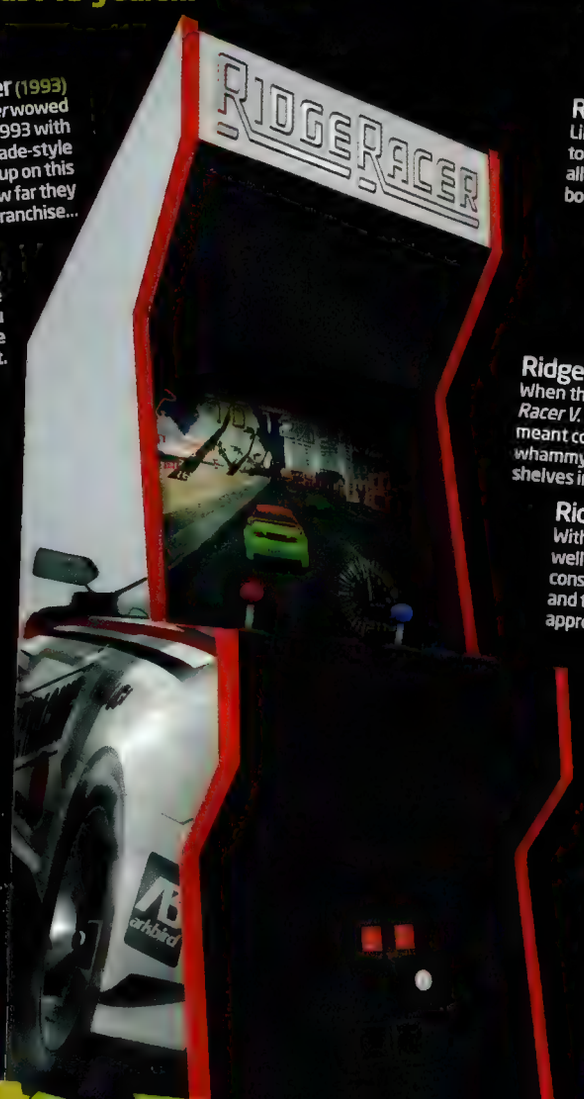
The new instalment hit the arcades a year after the original and featured more of the same with improved looks, better music and a rear-view mirror. Any arcade frequenters that hadn't been hooked by the first game soon fell like all the rest.

Rave Racer (1995)

A quick switch to the substantially more silly name of *Rave Racer*, and with the hideous new tagline 'catch the rave', and Namco had a game that was *Ridge Racer* again but with a few updates including an eight-player link-up. Thankfully the name changed back almost immediately.

Ridge Racer V: Arcade Battle (2000)

Launching in arcades at the same time as *Ridge Racer 5* launched with the PS2 - helping sales of the console and game a fair bit - was a cunning ploy from the bods at Sony and Namco, we're sure you'll agree. Not so cunning was the switch of mascots (see 'Skin Deep').



Playing At Home

Ridge Racer (1995, PSone)

We all knew what to expect as most had played it in arcades, but to sample *Ridge Racer* from the comfort of your own chair? Well, it helped shift a load of PSones. Oh, and it introduced a third-person view that never made it into the arcade.

Ridge Racer Revolution (1996, PSone)

This is where the now famous characters White Angel and 13th Racing Kid first turned up and beat the hell out of you in their obviously superior cars as you attempted to better their times. Gits.

Rage Racer (1996, PSone)

Like the arcade machine *Rave Racer*, *Rage Racer* took a more realistic approach to racing and allowed you customise your 'ride' with items bought with the credits you earned from racing.

R4: Ridge Racer Type 4 (1999, PSone)

The first 'true' home version as there was no arcade machine to base it on, *R4* introduced fans to split-screen racing. Also, a system was implemented that rewarded better performances with better vehicles prompting the start of many practice sessions.

Ridge Racer V (2000, PlayStation 2)

When the might of PS2 arrived, so did *Ridge Racer V*. Its near simultaneous debut in arcades meant consumers were hit with a double whammy of greatness and *Ridge Racer V* flew off shelves into buyers' brand new machines.

Ridge Racer 64 (2000, N64)

With PS2 in so many homes, this didn't perform as well as anticipated when it moved onto Nintendo's console. Those who wanted to play already had, and the hardcore Nintendo fans didn't really approve as much as had been hoped.

Ridge Racer DS (2004, DS)

Not learning from the N64 event, *Ridge Racer* turned up on DS to many laughs. Nintendo couldn't compete with the graphics that the PSP version was already showing, and attempting to steer with a stylus is something we'd rather forget.

Ridge Racer (2005, PSP)

Next to the DS offering, *Ridge Racer* looked awesome and contributed to the success of PSP's launch. It was also the moment we were greeted by nitrous and found out exactly how fast *RR* games could be.

Ridge Racer 6 (2005, Xbox 360)

A launch title for 360, *Ridge Racer* showed a whole new generation of potential fans its wares, only now it could rely on Xbox Live to bolster appeal. And now many of those fans are waiting for the PS3 instalment.

Come Slide With Me

It's going to take more than speed to cross that line in first place

If you know *Ridge Racer* then you know about drifting. In a move that completely denies the title of any realism, you can hit a corner at whatever nonsense speed you like and drift around it as long as you have the skill. This is not an option. If you want to win, you'll have to do lots of drifting – it's the very core of the game, and it's great.

The other element that will play an integral role in *Ridge Racer 7* is boosting. Again, this is a necessity and tactical 'boostage' is what the game will be all about. Drifting will earn you boost, your short-lived boosts can be triggered either on their own or grouped, and you use these to gain speed, drift more and gain further boost. If you're good (like we're not) you can get round entire courses without ever slowing up. It's just another reason why we want to get our grubby mitts on the seventh game so urgently.

Of course, numbers need to be added to this text at some point. With each racing title (along with every other genre, come to think of it) that turns up charged with the task of attempting to please today's more demanding gamer, the numbers relating to game content seem to grow. With that in mind, *Ridge Racer 7* has 40 available cars. That doesn't seem like all that many to us to be honest, but we're difficult to please. It will also feature 22 different tracks. Again, not a number that boggles the mind, but when it's considered that each will be raced in reverse also (that's raced around the other way, not in reverse gear, silly) its more acceptable. The customisation options that have been announced (sadly with very few actual details of how they will be implemented, but see 'If You Build It...' boxout for what's been revealed so far) hint at approximately 375,000 different possible variations of vehicle. Now that certainly is a big number, so maybe we'll close our doubting minds and shut our flapping mouths for now – all signs point towards 'awesome' as far as content goes...

These figures aren't going to be enough to quash the real cynics out there, however. It's the depth of the game that's really going to come into question and there are plenty of other racers across the formats that offer far more than crazy cornering, high speeds and indestructible cars that bounce from wall to wall. In a way it's fair to say that that the strong, never-changing core of the franchise is saving *Ridge Racer 7* from a tumble. Exactly how well the title would perform if it were thrown to the gaming masses without its favourable history is debatable. Sure, it would still be the same game. It'd still be great. But the competition would certainly take a large portion of potential buyers. Fortunately, even the most cynical of the cynics will have learnt not to question the series too much – it's gameplay we all know and love, all wrapped up in lovely new bits. Without wishing to curse the product prematurely – what could possibly go wrong?

The 'lovely new bits' we just mentioned are really what were being highlighted at TGS recently. Like new parents wishing to show off their baby's tiny fingers or a pet's latest trick, Namco was on hand to point out what it considered the best the product had to offer – namely the stuff that people didn't know of or expect, which was most of it, actually. It seems that a lot of focus went into online play with *Ridge Racer 7*. So much so, in fact, that Namco has announced that it wants players to feel like they are playing online even when they aren't. This has been done by placing race updates – ticker style – on screen at all times keeping informed as to what the rest of the racing world is up to. Obviously, most of the online effort has gone into things that are actually online and it's been announced that that the game has several different ways of matching players up with their perfect rivals as well as regular updates telling you which racers are performing the best. Also, standard elements that we'd probably cry about if they weren't featured yet never actually become skilled enough to get included in – such as world rankings and various leaderboards – have also been mentioned.

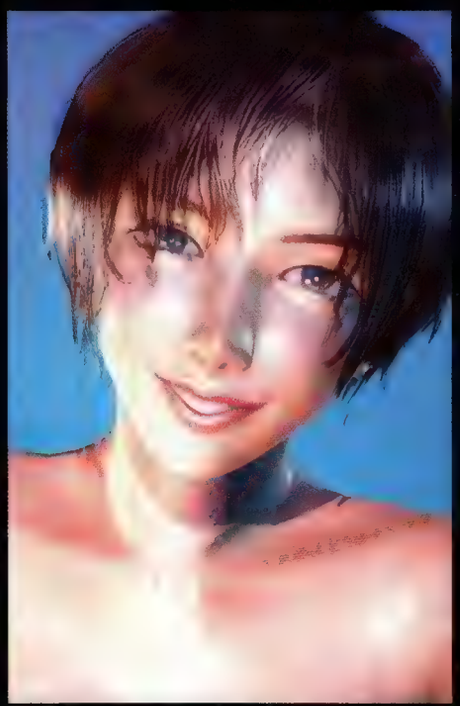
It all sounds great in a very familiar way. We'd love to be harsh enough to not be excited about *Ridge Racer 7*, but it simply doesn't work. We know it will be great because Namco has had much practice over the 14 previous versions of the game, and each one has impressed in exactly the same way as the last. Oh, and did we mention how great the visuals are...?

%complete

10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80 90 100

We're guessing that these new cars have some sort of time-travelling/*King Kong*-visiting device installed.

If we were allowed, this is the sort of number plate that we'd all have. Except ours would have 'LAST' written on it like the car's.



Skin Deep

It's the face that launched a thousand cars

It's a well-known fact that people like to look at pretty things in their spare time, so the fact that Namco decided to insert a very pretty face into the *Ridge Racer* series came as no real surprise. Reiko Nagase is a lovely virtual young lady who plays the role of 'Mascot' in the *Ridge Racer* games. She's very popular. To be honest, she doesn't really have any real purpose - much like those mascots the teams used to bring along on shows like *Blockbusters*, but it's more interesting than putting Pac-Man on the poster, so we can't really complain.

When *Ridge Racer V* was released with the PlayStation 2, a new Mascot was put in place of Reiko called Ai Fukami, but the masses were appalled by her mildly inferior looks and an online poll which most people in the world seemed to vote on demanded Reiko's return. Thanks to this poll, she made her comeback in the recent PSP version and has also been seen displaying her womanly wiles in the demo for *Ridge Racer 7*.

She's been a busy girl outside of *Ridge Racer* too. She featured as an unlockable character in the not-that-good *Anna Kournikova's Smash Court Tennis* and also in *Pac-Man Fever* - so she's not just a pretty face.

Speaking of her face, we probably shouldn't get too excited by her flawless facial features. It's rumoured that her face was actually based on her developer's. Who was, of course, a man. We'll never look at her in the same way again... p robably.

PS3 Publisher// Midway Developer// Epic Games Genre// FPS Players// TBA
Website// www.unrealtournament2007.com Release Date// Q4 2007

Keeping it Unreal

Unreal Tournament 2007

PICK UP gun. Aim. Shoot. Three easy instructions, and the driving force behind every first-person shooter to grace a console, when gamers let their competitive juices flow and compete for bragging rights. There's no misinterpreting a deathmatch scenario when you're dropped into a foreign landscape, handed a defenceless row, and the FPS gods spread a wide array of weapons in front of you. "Go on," says FPS God (who may or may not be geek lord and FPS world champion Fatality). "Pick that one." He gestures towards the rocket launcher glistening in the corner, hovering tantalisingly above the dirt. An ungainly scramble follows as you immediately know what to do. Pick up gun. Aim. Shoot.

No one does 'pick up gun, aim, shoot' better than *Unreal*. *Doom* might have been the first series to popularise the FPS genre and bring it to the mainstream, but *Unreal* was the first to realise that, hey, we have more fun shooting each other than we do lines of code. And so it came to pass – *Unreal* was arguably the first popular online PC shooter and the first to introduce the concept of 'bots' and have them work with any degree of competency. It's traded its name on this level of multiplayer goodness since then, adding vehicles, character abilities and more guns to the mix.

However, things have changed. *Unreal Tournament 2007* isn't just about blindly shooting at anything that moves and most things that don't. Okay, slight lie: it's still about shooting, shooting and more shooting, but as previously touched on in *Unreal Tournament 2004*, you can now conduct your own brand of warfare from the backseat of a vehicle. They've returned and they'll play a much bigger role in the warfare this time. One such vehicle is the Cicada. It sounds like a Spanish cocktail that drunken Brits clutch while dancing to *Girls And Boys* in Tenerife, but rather than that, it's an air vehicle designed to attack land targets. Lock onto any ground target and you'll fire a target at that exact spot. It's weak against enemy aircraft as it can't lock onto them, but either way it'll sober you up pretty damn quick. Which is just as well if you want to jump on one of the new hoverboards.

Hoverboards? No, it's not a typo. Why hoverboards? That's what we wondered and that's what you'll wonder when we tell you that hoverboards have now clambered into the *Unreal* series via the back door with a flickering neon light above it blaring 'dodgy ideas'. To allow for the vehicle tomfoolery, Epic has had to kick up the map sizes a notch and give players lots of empty space to scream around in. This is all well and good when

No one does 'pick up gun, aim, shoot' better than Unreal

Professional Gamers

Another reason to stay indoors and play games

GOOD NEWS// If you spend so long playing *Unreal Tournament 2007* that you get really, really, really good, you can make a career out of it. We know! The world's gone mad! Beats being an accountant.

STEP 1//Practise Then practise some more. Then practise some goddamn bloody well more. The top pros practise for eight hours a day. This is a career to them, not a hobby. They hate losers! And so do girls! And some other people probably do as well.

STEP 2//Go To Tournaments They'll probably be held on PC, such is the wonky tradition that is hard to escape from, but online tournaments have been blossoming the last few years. Either way, you need to place in offline tournaments to really get your name known.

STEP 3//Win Be like our friend here, vo0. The Dutch gamer has been pushing world FPS champ Fatal1ty hard over the last few years and won't give up until he makes the gosh-using-1-is-so-much-cooler-than-using-i American weep salty tears of vanquished sadness.

An orgy of death, large weapons and testosterone. That's *UT 2007*, that is.

you have a futuristic space jeep with nine machine guns and a laser death cannon on demand, but when you're on foot, well, it takes a long time to get anywhere – the videogame equivalent of missing the bus and walking into town. So the hoverboard was introduced to circumvent this problem. Admittedly, it's not as bad as it first sounds as it should mean less walking, more action. In addition to that, you're defenceless while using the hoverboard, so Epic isn't exactly encouraging you to abuse this new feature. Better (or worse, we haven't quite decided yet), you can also hitch a ride on other vehicles using an energy beam to latch onto them. Worse (there's no doubt about this one), a crude trick system has made it into the game. Granted, it's hardly *Tony Hawk* territory, but hoverboard tricks? In an FPS game? If you listen closely, you can hear the FPS gods weeping.

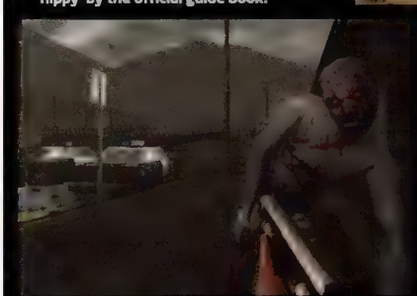
Unreal Tournament 2007 is a game of two teams: Axon and Necris. Broadly speaking, they can be described as human grunts and token skinless alien creatures. Axon are the macho cigar-chomping brutes of society, talking the language of growled one liners – 'grenade' – and gritted teeth. Their tactics revolve around the Leviathan vehicle, driven by one Axon member with four others jumping into the available turrets. It's carnage on wheels – the gunners can use energy shields to deflect fire and each turret sports a projectile with different properties, so there's plenty of room for impromptu tactics and clever manoeuvres. Even the driver has an energy weapon in case he gets bored listening to four people shouting 'quick, go left! No wait, turn right!' If there aren't Axon players about to fill those turrets, the Leviathan can be changed into a huge energy weapon, which obliterates whatever it fires at. It can't move while in this mode but, well, didn't you read what we said? It obliterates whatever it fires at. Hell, turn the damn thing on your own team-mates if they keep screaming annoying instructions and directions at you. Don't feel bad. They'd probably do the same to you too. Other than the Leviathan, Axon can use the afore-mentioned Cicada and also the Goliath, which, to all intents and purposes, is a standard tank complete with an eject button, which will presumably be a big red button protected by glass casing that has to be lifted up first. You know, like in the movies.

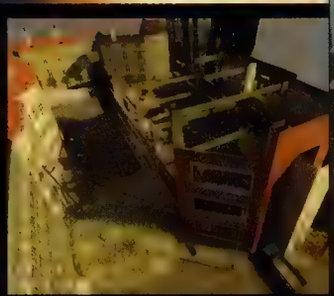
So then, the Necris. Far from standing around watching helplessly while Leviathan tears into their panicking ranks, Necris have their very own vehicles to employ. Three examples: the first is the Viper, a smaller fighter ship which can be used in kamikaze bomber style as you ignite the ship before crashing it into an enemy. The Viper is designed to be fast and agile, in contrast to the hulking mass of the Leviathan. The second is the Nemesis, a tank with treads that adapt to terrain and allow Necris to move heavy armoured vehicles into areas that the Axon wouldn't be able to. Finally, the Dark Walker. A tripod-like creature (think *War Of The Worlds*) which fires laser beams and absolutely needs a pilot to hum *Ride Of The*

Valkyries as he causes carnage in the alien-looking vehicle. The laser beam is pretty slow, so another player is needed to jump in the gun turret underneath to provide cover. Laser beam for vehicles; gun turret for infantry. Tactics, see. Needless to say, players have to think carefully about which side they should choose, which vehicle choice making a big difference to how the match is played out. Unless they're the last one in the lobby and they're forced to play as Necris or something – be quicker next time! Honestly, you noobs.

Speaking of online play, here's a tantalising prospect. PC gamers versus Playstation 3 gamers. Playstation 3 gamers versus PC gamers. Mmm. Cross-platform play is something that hasn't really taken off yet thanks to a multitude of logistical problems – unfair advantages with different control systems, different coding for different platforms, different ways of decoding the online information and so on. We're not developers, hence why we're sitting in an office at our keyboards at 7:30pm fuelled by Subway and Pepsi rather than talking about C++ down the pub or whatever it is that developers do, but even we can see the problems. Still, Epic Games relishes the challenge and is toying with the idea of cross-platform play. The big grey area is Sony has yet to establish a safe area when it comes to mods. More pertinently, Sony hasn't decided if it will control any mods for any unsuitable content or if it will let the modders and downloads regulate themselves, a la internet. And we all know

Not the most impressive vehicle, but we guarantee it will be described as 'weak' and 'nippy' by the official guide book.





O UNRLY?

Those crazy kids and their crazy mods

When *Unreal* was released on PC - in an age when dinosaurs ruled the Earth and anyone who suggested high def was the future was burnt at the stake - some primitive caveman played around with the source code for *Unreal*. This changed the appearance of players, enabled bedroom coders to build their own levels, make their own rules and all sorts of wackiness. *Unreal* in a shopping mall. *Unreal* in *Half-Life 2*. Unreal with zombies... even new game modes like Capture The Cow, Manhunt and George Bush's favourite, Jihad ("a teamplay mod that pits two teams against each other in a battle for control of The Temple"). The Playstation 3 version will support this feature -a first for consoles.

There's great detail in the character models. Not that you'll have time to appreciate it.

Playstation 3 Versus PC

How the two compare

They're being developed side by side, with the PC version the one that's been used to show off the game thus far. The good news is that Playstation 3 should look a tiny, tiny bit nicer than the PC version being whored about, especially as Epic becomes more confident with Playstation 3's development tools. Gameplay wise, it goes without saying that the keyboard-and-mouse combo wins out (see every other FPS game ever), but that might not be the case with *Unreal Tournament 2007*. Because of the heavy slant on vehicles, vehicle control is just as important, and on the keyboard, well, it's slightly wonky. Playstation 3 clearly has the advantage in this area thanks to the twin analogue sticks. You won't be able to aim quite as precisely or quite as quickly but, hey, at least you can run those damn PC players over.

PC gamers will be able to take on their PS3 counterparts online.

how self-regulation works out on the internet... Either way, the noises coming from Epic Games is that it wants to give Playstation 3 users the ability to use mods (perhaps even create their own) and hook up with PC players online for cross-platform loving and fooling around. Sounds interesting.

There hasn't been a confirmed listing of what game modes will scramble into the final code, but Epic Games has given clear hints as to what to expect. Onslaught mode will return from *Unreal Tournament 2004* while Assault, Domination and Bombing Run won't. Deathmatch, Team Deathmatch and Capture The Flag – surprise – will feature, along with a new vehicle-based Capture The Flag mode. The multiplayer mode the developer is hanging its hat on is Warfare, which is where most of the time and energy seems to have been invested. Unlike most multiplayer game modes, which tend to split two teams into attackers and defenders, both teams will be required to do both as they try and tick off a list of objectives to secure the win. On the Onyx Coast map, one player has to carry a power orb to a power node in order to capture it – do you intercept that player or go off and steal another power orb of your own? If that sounds like a weak Capture The Flag variant, objectives

Survival Of The Fittest

One-versus-one mode has been fixed

The problem with one-on-one matches is waiting around for someone else who wants to play that particular mode, as most players tend to run for the familiar, comfy arms of team matches. The answer? Survival mode. This is essentially a waiting lobby for players to drop into while the one-on-one match takes place, so the winner can take on the waiting player as soon as the match ends. It's a real head-smacker in that the answer is so obvious, you wonder why no one else has thought of it before. So that's another game mode fixed then. Thanks, Epic.

change throughout and Epic promises this plays more as a mini team-versus-team scenario rather than the traditional 'here are the rules, now go fight each other' battle.

For those who aren't planning on ramming a broadband cable up the backside of their Playstation 3's because they either have no interest, or they're farmers who live nowhere near a broadband zone, Epic is promising to taking care of the single-player mode too. Granted, all developers do this. After all, no one can recall the last time a developer came out and said, 'screw single-player, we really couldn't give a damn', before sticking their thumb to their head and wiggling their fingers. Yet given *Unreal*'s history, it's fair to expect a decent helping of love and care is heaved onto single player too. *Unreal* has managed to find a halfway house between *Doom*'s single-player focus and *Quake*'s multiplayer focus and there's no reason for that to change.

First up, the usual promise of better AI. Or rather, tweaked AI. Previously, the main characteristic to AI was that it was programmed to either hit or deliberately miss with their weapon, in an effort to ape the erractic aim of a human player. Fair enough but this has overlooked the fact that humans are cunning and unpredictable creatures who lie in wait to ambush opponents, set traps, out-think you and hold grudges for the most inane reasons (accidentally drove off in a team-mate's vehicle? Better watch your back until the end of the match). To that end, Epic is looking at making AI lifelike in how they act rather than how they shoot. There are AI taunts, tactics and tantrums in an effort to convince you that those lines of code are living, breathing, thinking humans. Epic jokes that *Unreal Tournament 2007* is similar to the Turing Test. Turing Test, for those who don't know, was a famous test for a machine to imitate human conversation so it would be impossible to differentiate between man and machine. In turn, we joke that Epic Games might not want to make such bold claims, especially if we see any AI bots get stuck behind a knee-high rock or continuously run into a wall. Though to be fair, some clueless American teenagers online will probably do exactly the same thing.

All multiplayer modes will have bots to replace humans, so lone warriors don't have to worry about not having anyone to shoot at. Storyline wise, it's still up in the air. It's a safe bet to say Axon and Necris aren't particularly happy with each other for whatever reason and have taken to resolving their issues with weapons, guns and more weapons. Hell, that might even be the story. No one knows. Epic might be promising single-player will be taken care of, but isn't talking about exactly how.

Time for the 'token boring bit of information that the developer is extremely proud of but you probably don't care about'. Each weapon is made up of somewhere between 40,000 and 50,000 polygons (who counted?) in an effort to increase immersion. Some guns open up and you can actually see the working parts moving around and chugging away inside the gun itself. Will we be moved to add extra marks to our review score while you clap your hands in glee because you can now see bits of metal moving around inside the gun? Will it make any difference at all? The answer is no and maybe. A big factor of first-person shooters is how satisfying the weapons are to fire and hit your target with, but that has more to do with the explosions than the inside of the gun. We'll see how much of a man these new guns make you feel.

Epic wants to let Playstation 3 owners hook up with PC players for cross-platform loving and fooling around

And that's *Unreal Tournament 2007*. It's looking nice, as you can see (50,000 polygons per weapon) and given the inclusion of vehicles and brand new multiplayer modes to tickle newcomers and veterans pink, it's sounding even better. Pick up gun. Aim. Shoot. That's all there is to it. See you in 2007.

PS3 **Publisher**//Activision **Developer**//Neversoft **Genre**//Sports **Players**//TBC
Website//www.neversoft.com **Release Date**//TBC

Throw logic out of the window, crank up the suspension of disbelief and enjoy – because Podunk is a skater's paradise

Tony Hawk's Project 8

The Birdman makes his next-gen debut

THERE'S NO point denying it, Tony's in a rut. And he's been that way for a while. Once the shining light of the videogaming world – a compelling and attention grabbing throwback to the days of high score tables and twitch gameplay – *Tony Hawk's* has descended into a pit of sub-*Jackass* humour and sub-*GTA* exploration, simultaneously losing its focus, its audience and everything that made it so great. In fact, one could argue that the series reached its pinnacle with *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 3* on PS2, a work of unadulterated genius that expanded the groundwork of its predecessors, giving it a next-gen lick of paint and an added layer of class in the process. Since those halcyon days, five years ago, *Tony* has become a joke – an EA Sports' style inevitable yearly update as welcome as the news of the PS3's delay.

Neversoft, the series' SoCal-based development team, was once the innovator. Now it had become an imitator, shoe-horning every gaming and cultural trend possible into the *Tony Hawk's* games. When *Jackass* was popular, we saw Bam Margera and his frat-boy cronies at every turn. Rockstar redefined the gaming landscape with *GTA*, and soon after *Tony Hawk's* had followed suit, with crude humour, open world wandering and dreadful, dreadful driving segments. Last year's *American Wasteland* was released at the time that Green Day's *American Idiot* was the biggest album on the planet. So what do we get? Billie Joe Armstrong as a playable character. Tony has become lowest common denominator gaming.

Well, actually, that should read 'had'. In a rare move in this industry, Neversoft has listened to the torrent of criticism that the *Hawk's* series has come under and taken it all on board. The latest, and unbelievably, EIGHTH game in the *THPS* series is bringing *Hawk* back to his roots. Gone are the gaudy colours. Gone are the Rockstar-lite themes. Gone is Bam Margera's dad. Just as skating has gone back under its shell again, losing its mass-market appeal and being reclaimed by those who owned it in the first place – the skaters – so has *Tony Hawk's Project 8*. This is a skate game for skaters, for those who know their indies from their 360 flips, and this is a skate game for gamers – those who know their 30 million point combos and their revert/manuals, and could quite happily never see Steve-O's banana Hammock again.

Confirming *Project 8*'s move towards a more realistic and dare we say it, gritty, version of skateboarding, is the game's look. The focus here is reality – high polygon counts on the skaters, fully animated faces, cloth physics, high texture detail and a bucket load of HDR lighting. You won't be grinding around the edges of a cruise liner, that's for sure. It's a striking look, certainly, and one that matches *Project 8*'s ambitions. It's all about the skating.

The game's stripped down storyline matches its looks. Tony and his crew

History of Tony

The Hawker has been around for quite some time

2005 // Tony Hawk's American Wasteland // A promise of a *San Andreas* open world turned out to be a falsehood. Tony needed a kick in the arse, and quickly.

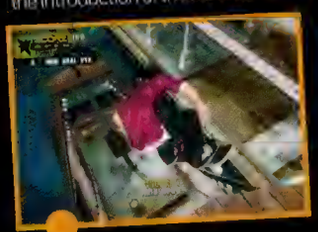
2004 // Tony Hawk's Underground 2 // The *Jackass* effect went full steam ahead, filling *Tony* with all manner of stupidity. Split fans down the middle.

2003 // Tony Hawk's Underground // *Tony* meets *GTA* with mixed results. The combo engine is as sound as ever, but the game was becoming stretched.

2002 // THPS 4 // The *Hawk's* formula began its diluting process with this attempt at a free roamer. Lost much of *THPS 3*'s focus.

2001 // THPS 3 // His first appearance on PS2, this is held up by many as *Tony*'s finest hour. A purist's dream.

2000 // THPS 2 // By improving on the winning formula, *THPS 2* took comboing to the next level with the introduction of the manual.



1999 // Tony Hawk's Pro Skater // Neversoft's ingenious reclamation of high score gaming proved to be one of THE great success stories.

The appearance of an *Oblivion* gate in Podunk concerned Tony and his friends.

descended on the nowheresville, USA town of Podunk on the flimsy premise that they may find eight young skaters to join their masses. Hence 'Project 8'. However unlikely this plot set up is, it means that nothing will detract from the in-game action. Picking from one of a selection of rather clichéd characters (skate punk kid, girl...), you take to the suburban streets with the freedom to go wherever you want and skate however you want to. There's no loading times: Podunk is a constantly streaming world. Not even *American Wasteland* style railway lines break up the *Project 8* universe, and about time too. As has become the game's tradition, goal and challenge markers appear across the map, in the form of characters who have an unusual penchant for all things skateboarding. So, you'll be heading towards young girls with cameras to show off your latest flip trick, or a glowing rail for a grind challenge. Nothing new, you might think, but Neversoft has been hard at work to include two major innovations to this year's tasks.

The first of these comes in the form of Puzzle challenges. Completely different from anything seen before in a *Tony* game, these unusual errands actually detatch you from the gamespace. You're asked to arrange a number of obstacles on a grid in order to go from point A to point B without touching the ground. As you progress through the game, these challenges become more and more elaborate. Towards the end of *Project 8*'s plot, you'll be asked to arrange these puzzles over two or three stories and over ever increasing distances. Incredibly satisfying when you get it right, and head-scratchingly frustrating if you don't. A welcome aside from all the traditional *THPS* jumping and grinding.

The second you ask? It's called Nail The Trick, and it's by far the most intriguing aspect of the eighth *Tony Hawk's* outing. You may have already cast your gaze over the trailer that surfaced at this year's E3, and if you did, you will have seen a number of slow motion shots lingering over the subtle manipulation and movement of the skaters' feet as they showed off their extensive trick repertoires. The trailer apes a skate video in terms of style, as have previous *Tony Hawk's* pre-release footage. However, this time, it's far more than stylistic hot air, it's a fundamental part of the gameplay, and will change your tricking and comboing for ever.

Recent *Tony* games have featured a bullet-time 'focus' mode, and this is its natural evolution. If you manage to get a decent amount of air from your ollie (or nollie, or boneless – we're not fussy), then you can go right ahead and click down in both analogue sticks. Doing so will cause the camera to crash zoom into your riders' feet, while time slows to a crawl. Now you're right in the middle of Nail The Trick, so what should you do? Well, nail the trick of course! Each stick now represents a foot, so with subtle manipulation of both, everything from a basic 'shove-it' to an 'impossible' are... possible. It's *Project 8*'s new Havoc-based physics engine in action – the board is not moved by pre-

Nail the Trick

A 'how to' guide on Tony 8's most innovative new feature

So, you've managed to get a decent amount of air, and you fancy showing off...

Well, click both analogue sticks in, and let's get started.

The camera zooms in on your boarder's feet and deck.

Time slows down, and you can manipulate the board with both analogue sticks.

So, if you think you're the king of the 360 flip, now you'll have to prove it.

Nail the Trick, land it, and you're in for a big score.

drawn animation, it is now an object with real physical properties, and your feet move it appropriately.

If indeed you do manage to nail the trick, you'll be handsomely rewarded with a stack of those lovely points that *Tony Hawk's* players love so much. It can be integrated into combos with ease, build some momentum with a few grinds and downhill manuals, hit a ramp, ollie, 'nail the trick' and land for a massive points bonus. The days of grinding in a circle on *THPS 3*'s airport baggage claim are most definitely over.

The impact of this design alteration is not to be underestimated. It's a completely new way to play, effectively educating players in the intricacies of the sport. By concentrating on the shifting of weight from one foot to another, timing, and the sheer difficulty involved in pulling off the simplest of tricks, *Tony Hawk's* has finally stopped taking skating for granted. The biggest revolution in the series' history? Well, it's not quite the 'manual', but it's not far off.

In fact, the entire skating engine has been reworked. The focus this year is 'momentum'. Aware that the likes of *THUG 2* had taken the 'pushing reality' notion too far with near-vertical grinds and physically-impossible leaps, *Project 8* is going to make

There's a part of Southampton that looks just like this. True fact - fact fans.

You'll still be throwing down huge combos, finding exciting new lines and crying when that huge score crumbles into red dust

Innovitive use of slow [illegible] enables you to invent [illegible]

This man is called Stevie Williams. He's an excellent skater.

Jumping high means you spend more time in the air. This is a fact.

World in Motion

Neversoft's new Mo-cap studio makes Tony 8 beautiful

Deep within its Californian lair, Neversoft has constructed a state-of-the-art motion-capture studio for the sole purpose of improving the *Tony Hawk's* series. And it shows. This year's version has liquid-smooth body movement on each of its myriad skaters, helped in no end by Neversoft's insistence that each of the game's featured characters actually performed their own motion-capture personally. Not only do we get the different stylistic nuances of each boarder now, but also a host of special and signature moves that add to the feeling of 'being' your chosen skate rat. A far cry from controlling Bam Margera's fat dad, no?

CONTINUATION//

you earn your combos. By slowing the player down, you now have time to think about each trick, and as such you won't get any luck by repeating the same old shove-it over and over. Also, if you want to roll up a steep hill, then you better have a decent amount of speed to begin with. It's all about locating large hills, and skating down them at neck-breaking speeds. Just like real life. And you know what happens in real life? People get hurt.

So what happens if you don't 'Nail the Trick'? What happens when you mistime that crucial grind, or reach for an extra kicklip when you really should be landing? Well, you hurt yourself, to put it simply. New to *Tony Hawk's Project 8* is the bail mini-game – a Havoc physics based pain simulator that is as hilarious as it sounds. After bailing on a combo attempt, your skater flies skywards, limbs flailing, pain imminent. From the split second you leave your board, you have control – you can manoeuvre your man through the air to ensure maximum agony. The game will keep track of any bones you may have broken, and how much damage you've caused yourself. It's the type of challenge that will keep the kids happy for hours – we're fond of trapping the boarder's head in-between two ledges and hearing the resulting crunch. No wonder the team has included official 'bail challenges' within Podunk's expansive environment.

However, the real beauty of Podunk is that you can quite happily skate around it for hours without even feeling the need to engage in a challenge. The town has been constructed in such a way as to provide a literally limitless amount of combo and line opportunities. In a world where major cities place barbed wire, slanted walls and spikes just to stop people skating, it feels somewhat unusual to be in an area that positively encourages it. Benches are always conspicuously close to rails; there's a surprising number of hills, and surely no other place on earth has this many skate parks. Still, throw logic out of the window, crank up the suspension of disbelief and enjoy – because Podunk is a skater's paradise.

Essentially the same size as *American Wasteland*'s, this constantly streaming world has an almost incomparable amount of detail. Whereas most of *A.W.* took place at ground level, *Project 8* is a 3D game in every sense of the term. Rooftops come into play like never before, so you can race across a neighbourhood, hitting gaps between each suburban bungalow before launching into an insane acid drop into the neighbour's pool. Podunk allows for a freedom of expression like never before in a *Tony* game, allowing players to get as creative and stylish as humanly possible.

And when you tire of simply carving up the city streets, *Project 8*'s goal system – modelled on *Tony 4* – will have up to 10 challenges open at any time, so you never feel restricted. Some will bemoan the lack of a 'classic' mode; after all, there's a lot to be said for those two-minute time limits and S-K-A-T-E challenges, but Neversoft assure us that many of the game's tasks follow the classic template, mixing the old and new to keep things fresh.

This is pretty much the entire *Project 8* ethos, in fact. There's a great foundation of history and success that precedes this latest edition of *Tony Hawk's*, and Neversoft isn't about to abandon everything. You'll still be throwing down huge combos, finding new lines and crying when that huge score crumbles into dust. But now you'll be doing it with a progressive set of rules. *Tony* simply had to change, and *Project 8* shows this.

Will series fans feel betrayed by Neversoft's bold changes? Well, perhaps, but for every fanboy who fears change, there'll be another who embraces it. *Tony Hawk's Project 8* should well be the game that pulls the series back from the brink. Next-gen so often just means better graphics, HDR lighting and bigger environments, but Neversoft has utilized the power of PS3 to perfect the art of *Tony Hawk's* – four wheels, one deck, one skater. And you.

Neversoft has clearly listened to the torrent of criticism that the Hawks series has come under recently, and taken it all on board

%complete

10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80 90 100

next[3] hype

Publisher // Ubisoft **Developer** // Bethesda Softworks **Genre** // RPG **Players** // 1
Website // elderscrolls.com **Release Date** // March

Standing on the edge of a truly awesome RPG

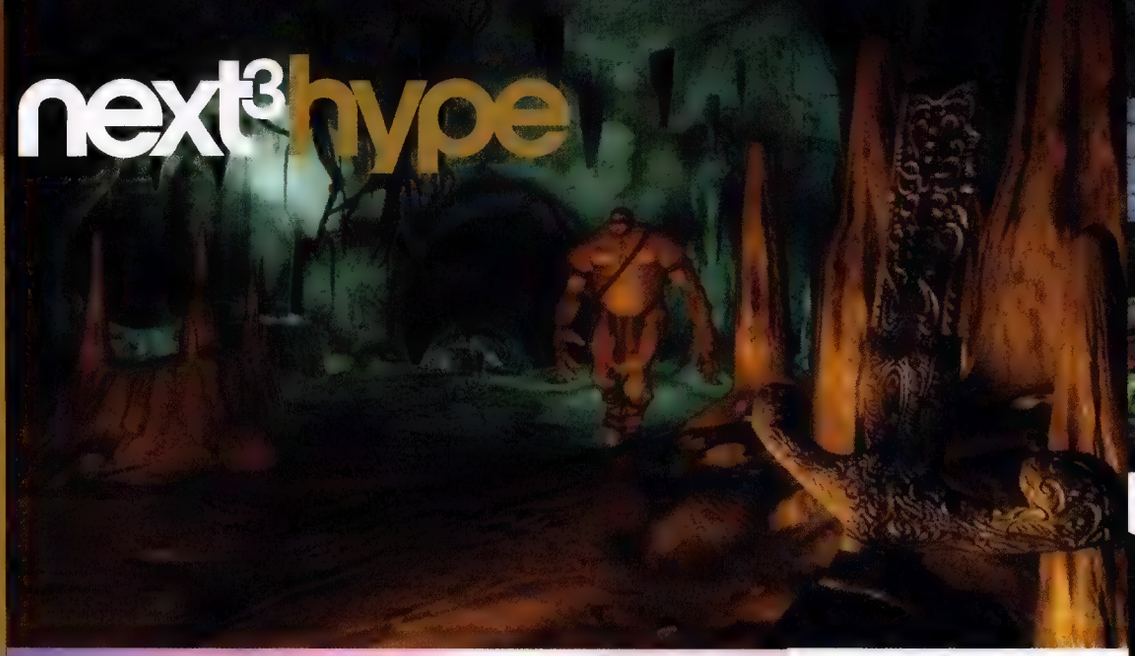
The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion

IT'S COMING. Oh boy, is it coming. *The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion* was the biggest game on Xbox 360 in every way possible. The biggest in scope, in size, in ambition, in critical acclaim and it's heading your way. Best start making room for it in your life because once it's here, it'll dominate every aspect of it. What you do, what you think about and every conversation. You think we're exaggerating. We say, you wait and see.

The simple reason for *Oblivion*'s success is that, at its heart, it's a game of choice. Even at the very start of *Oblivion*, as you're moving through a dark passageway trying to find the warmth of the outside world, you're bombarded with questions. What character class? What eye colour? What hair length? Good at killing or talking? What star sign? Having fended off Bethesda's eagerness, you find the choice doesn't apply to how you answer the questions but how you play the game too. You can do anything. An-y-thing.

Of course, there are real world rules that keep you in place in the virtual world of Tamriel. Thou must not steal! Thou must not kill! And... that's pretty much it. Stay on the right side of the law and you're free to go wherever you want and act however you please. Needless to say, you're also bound by physical laws. You can't walk through walls, jump 100-feet in the air and so on. You might think that's stating the obvious but it's worth stating because apart from those rules, you're free to do as you please. Talk to beggars in the street and give them change. Threaten the guards and watch them snarl. Build a bridge out of cabbage to reach the open window of someone's house. Alternatively, pick the lock on their backdoor, sleep in their bed, drink some of their wine in the morning and kill the surprised homeowner when he returns. Conjure a demon warlord from the depths of Oblivion and march into town intent on destruction. Talk animals into protecting you as you roam the forest for food. Pick flowers to make new potions. Get drunk in a local tavern or have a side business in selling the illegal drug Skooma. Hell, you can even get around the no killing rule if you provoke civilians into attacking you first. You were acting in self-defence! Or kill them if you don't mind some time behind bars or going on the run as an outlaw.

That's what's so liberating about *Oblivion*. The feeling that you're no longer playing by the rules videogames have traditionally lumbered you with is really refreshing, as you take your first tentative steps outside the box that you're used to being caged in. You'll be surprised at yourself for the old habits you've picked up from games throughout the years. "This is a locked door" is



The remarkable vistas and environs make Oblivion that much more impressive.

He did the monster mash... it was a graveyard smash...

I Hear Voices

The voice Talent. They get the voice bit spot on!

Sean Bean *(Brother Martin)*
The voice you'll be hearing the most, as Brother Martin plays a crucial role once you get the opening events of *Oblivion* out the way. Oddly enough, he seems content to stick to the game's script rather than rant about Sheffield United, talk about how much he hates Bond and moan about how much *Lord Of The Rings* and all that bloody walking really hurt his feet. Shame.

Patrick Stewart *(Uriel Septim)*
"In thouest eyes, I doth seekest the warmest companion! Takest this Amulet Of Kings, thou takest, to the next in the Septim bloodline!" See the dial shoot right past ten on the Shakespearian gibberish scale as Stewart loses all grip on reality and making sense; he's killed off at the first possible opportunity by a secret assassin guild.

Lynda Carter *(various)*
She used to be Wonder Woman, now she sounds like an elderly mother telling you off, trying to sound cross but fearful that old age has given her voice a tell-tale quiver that belies her position in the family. Annoy the female townsfolk of Tamriel and see if you can spot which one she is (clue: she threatens to steal your Werther's Originals if you really wind her up).

CONTINUATION //

usually followed by a sag of the shoulders, 180 degree turn and trudge in another direction to find the token single unlocked door in the area. Here, you can just lockpick it. Simple. Even restraint is something that doesn't have to be adhered to. Everyone's had a moment where a character's voice has proved annoying enough for you to really, really want to kill him. No real reason for you to do this, of course, except you just don't like him. It could even be his face, his hair, his shoes, just the way he's looking at you. Now you can! Attack him! Set him on fire with a spell! Fire an arrow at his arse! Smack him with a sword! You'll end up with the city guard stomping all over you for doing so, but so what? You can kill annoying characters! About bloody time too.

If the Xbox 360 version is anything to go by, *Oblivion* is the playground for you to form your own stories in and some of the stories we've heard are testament to how *Oblivion* lets your imagination dictate how you play. Soon enough, you'll stumble onto your own unique sequence of events to relay to people who won't even try to show the slightest interest. For example, you battle your way through Tamriel's gladiatorial arena and emerge triumphant, only to find an adoring

You don't have to close these oblivion gates to have a bit of fun.

fan waiting outside for you. He wants to follow you around and you agree, only to find him ruining your stealth missions and ambushes with his clumsy ways. Eventually you decide to ditch him. Except rather than tell him to get lost, you lead him into the room of the basement in a house you've bought, slap him about a few times, tell him to wait there and then pile up crates and items on the trapdoor to ensure he never escapes. It's for his own safety. You've got to be cruel to be kind.

The point to *Oblivion*, in case you're wondering, is to come to the aid of Cyrodiil, a land under siege from Oblivion gates opening up and letting daedra through to wreak havoc. You begin behind bars, taunted by a dark elf in the opposite prison, when Emperor Uriel Septim VII passes through to access a secret passage located in your cell. The guards agree to let you tag along and after you witness the assassin cult Mythic Dawn murder the Emperor, Uriel Septim orders you to find the last remaining son of the Septim bloodline, as only he can close the gates of Oblivion. He passes you the Amulet Of Kings, which can only be worn by a member of the Septim bloodline, then dies from his wounds. Then you're on your own. Your path is up to you and your destiny is entirely in your hands.

As you can tell it's all veryily doth merrily with its language, wrapping itself up in the *Dungeons And Dragons* style of pretentiousness that you instinctively learn to fear. Yet *Oblivion* retains a human touch that stops you from feeling too disgusted by the faux-Shakespearian language. There are stories of corrupt guards, drug-addicted husbands, civilians in trouble with loan sharks, lost children, brave sons and night-time thieves.

Again, you have the choice to continue on to save Oblivion or you can get caught up in every side-story and every little drama that fleshes out *Oblivion* and makes it feel real. And that dark elf taunting you at the start? You can always break back into the prison to wreak revenge on him. Go on. You know you want to, simply because you can.

If you do get caught up in one of the side-missions, the Bethesda send you hurtling off on a brand new rollercoaster that you won't know where it's going or where it ends. For example, walking into a house sees you strike up conversation with the female owner. She says she used to go on heists with her husband, until he got greedy and careless, getting arrested by the village guard. His last act was to bury the money

Fighting Style

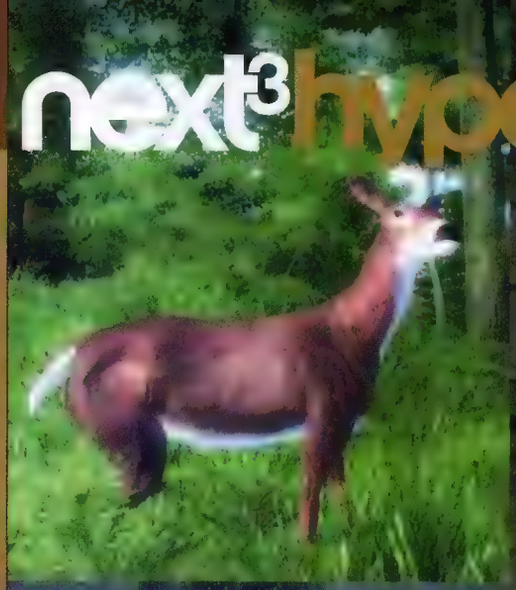
All included except Shaolin shadow-boxing

Swordsman *The Lord Of The Rings* choice, the vanilla of the *Oblivion* world. Pick a sword, wade in, mash the attack button for a bit, then hold block in an attempt to convince those watching that your character choice really is rooted in skill and not *Dynasty Warriors*-esque button-bashing. Good job convincing them too. No, really. Well done.

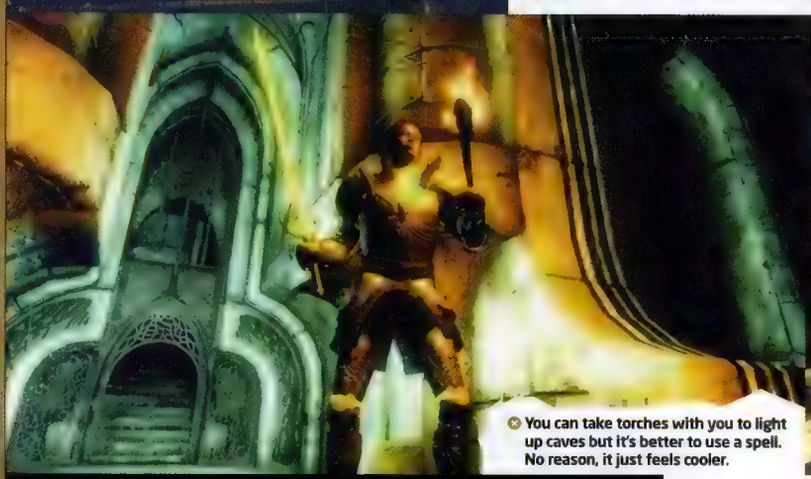
Conjurer The 'Merlin' choice; it's easiest just to summon others to do your work for you. Daedric Warlords, stone golems, giant spiders, zombies, skeletons, whatever you fancy. Or you could just hurl fireballs from distance. But your Daedric Warlord does that too AND he gets to wear a fancy outfit made out of nothing but the Spit Of Satan. It's this year's in thing, don't you know.

Marksman The 'Robin Hood' choice; those going down the archery route will find it incredibly hard going to begin with as arrows are weak and enemies charge you after getting hit, allowing you two shots at most. Once you have the bows that enchant your arrows with fire, ice and other magical goodness, then it pays off.

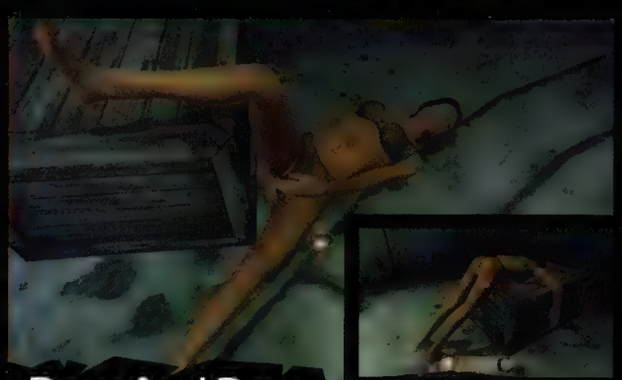
Merchant *The Merchant Of Venice* choice; you can't actually fight but you can get a damn good deal on armour and charm people into liking you and giving away information on quests, hidden treasure and such-like. Knowing a few bar-room jokes isn't going to do you a lot of good when you come up against a ten-foot fire-breathing lizard.



You'll feel like a God. A cowardly, puny God but a God nonetheless.



You can take torches with you to light up caves but it's better to use a spell. No reason, it just feels cooler.



Drag And Drop

You can do rude things to people!

Conjurer

One of the overlooked features of *Oblivion* was how you could pick up any item or object providing it was light enough and drag those that proved too heavy. This extended to people as well, with the practical use being that corpses could be dragged out of the view of guards. Not that this stopped players having plenty of fun dragging corpses into rivers or building makeshift 'jails' around NPCs using crates while they idly chatted. Still, this innocent fun paled into comparison to the scrappy digicam shots that ended up bombarding forums, showing the rude positions you could drag people into. Some people eh? Still, let's not pretend you won't be doing the same on release day. Oh come now. Just admit it.

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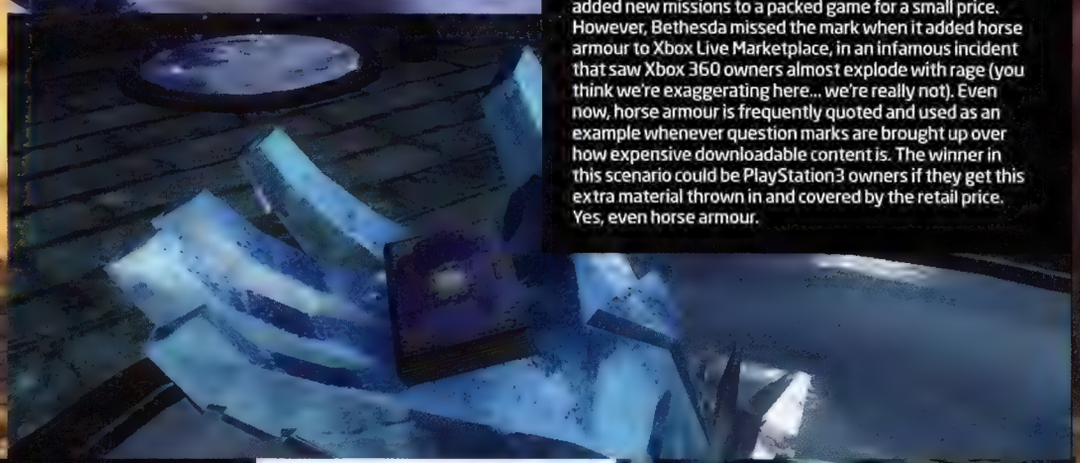
in a hidden location and now he's behind bars, it's impossible for her to find out. If you find out however, there's a cut in it for you... so you try talking to the husband but he doesn't trust you. Get yourself arrested, however, and he believes you're on his side and then reveals that he was betrayed by his wife, leading to his arrest and that he won't tell you where the money is unless you bring back proof that she's dead. So who do you believe? Whose side do you take? There's a further kink in the tale, whichever path you choose.

"Next3! Spoilers!" you cry, worried that you've had a potentially decent experience ruined by the careless (yet tender) lips of this magazine. Don't worry. There are millions and millions of quests in this beast of an RPG. Millions. We can't give you an exact figure because no one's counted. But it's probably somewhere in the region of millions. Dotted about *Oblivion*'s huge countryside are forts, caverns and islands, all of which have their own quests and can just be explored. You don't need a wizard in flowing arms to wave his robe about and say "fetch me the Staff of Nazaroth!" in order to check out the crumbling fort lying to the East. You can just go there anywhere and explore. Find some treasure? Keep it. Fighting some tough enemies? Level up against them. Discover some new quests way off the beaten track? Have a crack at them as well.

A quick word on the leveling up system – it adapts to the way you play. It's not particularly clever and can't read your mind but rather, it rewards whatever tactic it is you practice the most. If you use destructive magic more than you bash troll's heads in with clubs, then your destructive magic stats will increase as you can throw bigger fireballs, cause electrical storms and freeze enemies simply by touching them. With stats for athleticism, sneaking, lock-picking, heavy armour, conjuration, illusion, speechcraft, marksman, mercantile and everything inbetween, you'll have your very own character crafted your very own way as you pour the hours in.



Extra, Extra!

Downloadable content added?

Bethesda has had something of a love/hate relationship with Microsoft's Xbox Live Marketplace service: an area where developers can dump extra game content for gamers to buy. Mostly, it's been good news. The Spell Tomes addition, for example, brought new scenarios and spells for users to play around with, as other content added new missions to a packed game for a small price. However, Bethesda missed the mark when it added horse armour to Xbox Live Marketplace, in an infamous incident that saw Xbox 360 owners almost explode with rage (you think we're exaggerating here... we're really not). Even now, horse armour is frequently quoted and used as an example whenever question marks are brought up over how expensive downloadable content is. The winner in this scenario could be PlayStation3 owners if they get this extra material thrown in and covered by the retail price. Yes, even horse armour.

Pleased to see you too, oh beautiful blacksmith. Now fix my sword. Double-time.

If spells tickle your fancy, there are enough here to make Merlin wish he learnt something more useful than turning women into frogs or whatever it was he did, the sexually repressed old twerp. You're literally spoilt for choice as you choose from the sneaky (invisibility, which does what it says on the tin) to the practical (light, which helps you find your way around caves) to the odd (charm, which makes people like you) to the downright rude (conjuration, which brings beasts from the planes of Oblivion to fight on your side). When you've summoned a giant spider that can fry enemies with lightning bolts to do your bidding while you cower in the corner of the room under the veil of your invisibility spell, you'll feel like a God. A cowardly, puny God but a God nonetheless.

Oblivion also looks wonderful. It's not going to be the most beautiful game you'll ever lay eyes upon, which is a result of having to stretch its beauty across a huge landscape. Yet it looks more than gorgeous, it looks alive. Developers and PRs are particularly fond of shouting the phrase "a living, breathing world!" if their racing game features anything more than a crowd with two animations or something equally trite. The only game that can lay claim to the living, breathing world phrase is *Oblivion*. You don't even have to play the game itself to see this in action. Just stand around in one of the towns and watch the villagers drinking, eating, talking to each other, getting into fights, locking up their homes at night, defending themselves against possible intruders, all set to a mesmerizing landscape where day becomes night and melts back into day again.

Physics play a huge part in how the world feels. Boxes can be knocked over, people can be pushed around, pots smashed by errant arrows. If you want to try out the physics, try this. Paralyse a character as he stands on the edge of a tall cliff. This will freeze that character solid, so fire an arrow at his forehead and watch the momentum rock him backwards until he tips over and... you can imagine the rest. Down, down, down he tumbles, disappearing into the shroud of mist below while you cackle with wicked glee. It feels coherent, looks lovely and Jeremy Soule's soundtrack was the icing sealing the deal on an atmospheric cake (work that one out). It's impossible to describe his soundtrack with words but if we were to try, pompous phrases such as "swirling violins", "moody cello" and "dramatic flutes". We probably wouldn't use "party salsa" to describe it but then that's why we write about videogames, not music.

Oblivion was also released on PC and has seen the beardy community kicking out mods at a fair rate to further improve the atmosphere of the epic RPG. There's no word on whether any of the mods will carry over into the Playstation 3 version but we sincerely hope so. Modders have improved the warer, added blurry vision for when your character drinks, tint to the windows that come alive at night and a death camera, showing what happens to your body when you die, vital for those tumbles down cliffs while an arrow is stuck in your forehead.

This preview has been full of tales about *Oblivion* and there's a simple reason for that – apart from the choice, the customization, the ambition and the atmosphere, your ability to create your own adventure within the *Oblivion* world is the engine at the heart of this title. Book time off work. Cancel those holidays. Find out where the 'silent' key is on your mobile. Dump your girlfriend, boyfriend, whoever. They'll get round to it anyway because when *Oblivion* comes out, you're not going to venture outside for a long, long time...

%complete

There are few games that have caught our attention like F1. It looks absolutely stunning.

Will this iteration of *Formula One* be any more playable than past versions?

Sony cultivates the formula for success

Formula One Championship Edition

PS3 **Publisher**// Sony **Developer**// Liverpool Studio **Genre**// Racing **Players**// 1 **Website**// http://eu.playstation.com/ps3 **Release date**// March 2007

AFTER YET another name change it's reassuring to know that Sony's *Formula One* sim has still retained the potential to be one of the best racing game on the Playstation 3. After making a brief appearance at E3, *Formula One Championship Edition* resurfaced at this year's TGS looking and playing like a completely different animal. Now with a larger part of the game playable we got a much better picture of how the game should eventually turn out and have to admit we're very excited. With legendary tracks Monaco, Suzuka and Imola all offering themselves up for a test run we got a slice of the exotic locations, whining engines and blistering speeds that define what the game and the sport is all about. Now all we need is a wallet crammed full of cash and a dolly bird latched onto our arm and we'd be the real deal.

The tracks on offer gave us a great opportunity to experience just a taste of the throttle-commanding straights, tight corners and high-speed chicanes that will be the staples of the final game and they all pass the crash test. You learn to master the circuits by first sticking to a colour-coded system similar to the one implemented in Forza Motor sport, where the indicator flashes green for more speed, red to brake and yellow to easy up on the gas. Whilst this might seem like hand-holding you need all the help you can get with AI racers that are far more aggressive then we've experience before and a more deliberate lean towards simulation than arcade style of play.

Handling gets more interesting when the ultra-realistic weather effects kick in. Whilst we were lining up on the starting grid at Monaco the heavens opened which made the race a rather different prospect. Not only do you have to deal with rain saturating your visor but also the shower of spray kicked up by the car in front of you making it almost impossible to see and giving you all the more incentive not to get stuck at the back of the pack. Both the visual and technical aspects of this game are improving with every playtest and when you consider that it offers every single car, circuit, driver and team from the F1 World Championship this looks set to become an instant favourite with Formula One fans everywhere. We say everywhere, but we actually mean in Europe as it's yet to be announced for release in the US, sorry fellas.

%complete

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Handling gets more interesting when the ultra-realistic weather effects kick in

▼ OBLIVION // FORMULA ONE CHAMPIONSHIP EDITION // FATAL INERTIA ▲

Weapons apart

Messing with gravity

The weapons we've seen so far are a good deal more interesting than you'd expect from such a racer. Of course there's the regulation weapon types; missiles, rockets, shields etc... many of the devices used to slow or destroy your opponents are firmly based around using gravity, momentum and weight. Some rockets, for example, will attach themselves to other racers and ignite, often causing a violent wipe out. Magnetised weights also feature as well as weighted tow cables and weapons that link two vehicles together.

Fatal Inertia

Can Koei pull a fatality on Wipeout?

THERE ARE so many ideas floating around about the future of spectator sports, one recurring theme seems to be extreme anti-gravity racing. Of course the biggest and best proponent of the genre is *Wipeout*, and to be honest no one's ever got close enough to trouble the king of futuristic racers – a truth that, when Koei's *Fatal Inertia* was announced, made it easy to dismiss Koei's high-speed racer as a wannabe. Whilst first opinions are still very much divided, nowhere more so than on the Next3 team, *Fatal Inertia* has some very definite upsides, along with some particularly obvious downsides.

Judging from what we've seen of the game so far the main issue we have with *Fatal Inertia* is that it simply doesn't seem fast enough, and given that a *Wipeout* title is likely to be headed the PS3's way it's unlikely that Koei's racer will have the lightning-fast punch to out-do a Sony franchise that's been sitting pretty at the top of its game for some time. Sure, we don't suspect *Fatal Inertia* to be able to compete on the same level, but what we are expecting is something a little different.

To some of us here at Next3, that's the appeal: the fact that, regardless of the similarity to *Wipeout*, *Fatal Inertia* looks to offer a different experience, one firmly based on real world physics. Crash into another craft and marvel at the way they react to the various forces acting on them. Take out huge chunks of the course to hinder your opponents with debris and use a wide range of physics-based weapons to take out fellow racers. A game that'll undoubtedly split the masses; at least half of us can't wait for Koei's first racer.

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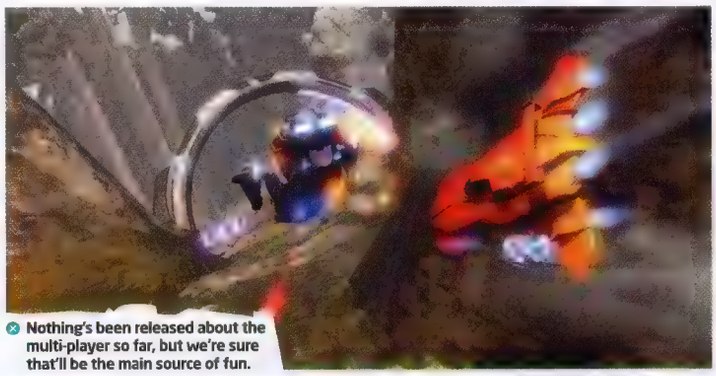


Nothing's been released about the multi-player so far, but we're sure that'll be the main source of fun.

PS3 **Publisher**//Koei **Developer**//In-house **Genre**//Racing **Players**//TBC
Website//www.koei.com **Release date**//March

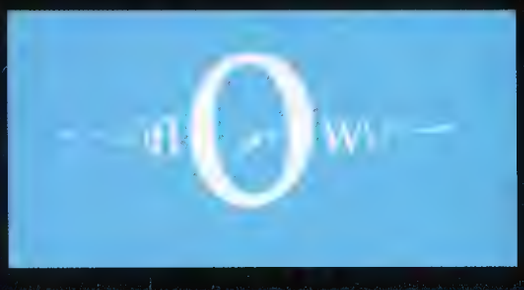
These screens suggest a greater level of speed than the demos have been able to deliver thus far.

fl0w

Just g0 with it

An amazing boss fight. Eat specific parts of its anatomy to beat it.

The more acquatic dwellers you eat, the more majestic your form becomes



PS3 **Publisher** / SCEA **Developer** / SCEA **Genre** / Strategy **Players** / 1
Website / http://www.thatgamecompany.com/flow.html **Release date** / March

IT'S FUNNY isn't it, that in this climate of costly development budgets and highly priced but entirely generic videogames, originality and innovation can appear and exist with only a fraction of the budget of its contemporaries. Such is *fl0w* – a game designed by last year's GDC indie games competition winner, Jenova Chen. Imagine *Electroplankton* meeting *Feeding Frenzy* in a bar and, after several drinks, the two of them going back to a dingy motel and inviting *Snake* for a threesome. *fl0w* is the messy result.

You pilot a tiny aquatic organism and venture through the many levels of an ocean-like biosphere, consuming other organisms, evolving as you do, and advancing further into the abyss. By eating a red single-cell organism the player descends a level – whilst consuming a blue organism brings you closer to the surface. The aim is to continually descend, eating small organisms that cause your snake-like creation to mutate. But be careful: there are enemies down there that will gladly take chunks out of you too. Thankfully you can take chunks out of them – and further mutate as you do. Music plays a fairly large part in proceedings – with beautiful melodies overlaying the action.

fl0w has been available online for a couple of months – and in its first two weeks online attracted 350,000 downloads. Sony is looking to emulate the same success by distributing the game through its online service. The PS3 version is developed by That Game Company, and won't differ too wildly from the original design. With a simple, effective design and aesthetic to match, *fl0w* could do for Sony's PlayStation Network Platform exactly what *Snake* did for dodgy Nokia mobile phones.

The fighting now takes place in different battle arenas rather than soiling the game board with blood and bits.

Eye Of Judgement

Come have a go if you think you're card enough

PS3 **Publisher**//Sony **Developer**//In-house **Genre**//Strategy **Players**//1-2
Website//www.eu.playstation.com/ps3 **Release date**//TBA 2007

MAKING THE most of all this lovely new technology *Eye Of Judgement* uses an Eye-Toy style camera to read real life trading cards and represent them as 3D monsters on screen. Once your monsters have been given life they're placed on a 3x3 chessboard and your goal then is to occupy five of the nine squares available on the board.

Since its last appearance a few months back everything here is looking much more pleasing to the eye – the camera has undergone plenty of refinement and the detailed monsters now battle in individual arenas instead of on the board itself. The battle location is dictated by which square of the grid you occupy at the time of the challenge and elemental factors play a part in how the fight plays out because both environment and skills are based around the elements of earth, fire, water etc. In terms of characters there's plenty of gruesomely gorgeous beasts to command as well as the usual fantasy staples like dragons, orcs and demons.

With this many technical and visual advances we're now very excited to see if Sony can continue to trim the fat and deliver a card strategy card game that's both innovative but indulgent.

%complete

PS3 **Publisher**//TBA **Developer**//Acony Games **Genre**//FPS **Players**//1-16
Website//www.primetide.com/acony/ **Release date**//TBA 2007

Parabellum

Remember, remember Black November

IF YOU'RE not a gambler or your skin burns faster than a petrol-soaked haystack then you might not want to join Team Rainbow in Vegas next year, but luckily enough there's now an alternative way to settle your score with those troublesome terrorists. In *Parabellum* an extremist group known as Black November is holding the entire city of New York to ransom by threatening to detonate a dirty bomb if their various demands are not met. But knowing George Bush's penchant for a good ol' shoot up we know full well that's not going to happen so you're sent in to neutralise the threat.

With a focus on multi-player action and utilising the power of the Unreal Engine 3 you work closely with your squad of five to carry out your objectives. This could make for an interesting online experience with you and your mates using the leader boards to sort the terrorists from the terrified. Nevertheless, we still remain a little sceptical about *Parabellum* as it's yet to court a publisher and with rookie developer Acony Games at the helm we want to see more before reserving our spot on the squad.

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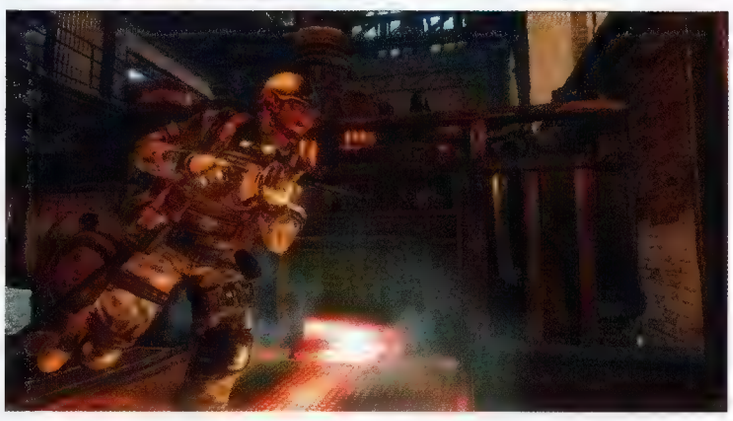
Squad-based shooting - just what the Playstation 3 needs lots of.



These screens may look great, but the mid-air tussle animations are looking a little underdeveloped at the moment.

Dragon Hopping

Feel free to ride the dragons

One of the most impressive aspects of *Lair* was shown at this year's Tokyo Game Show. The battles are of a truly epic nature and rather than being surgically attached to your scaly steed, you're given the option to leap from one dragon to another and deliver an express bash to the noggin for either rider or dragon. You're also given the freedom to land and terrorise the lowly rank-and-file troops with a little heavy breathing.

Hit the ground and mash the enemy into the floor with your big leathery feet.

Lair

Okay, mate, no need to get Lairy

PS3 **Publisher**//Sony **Developer**//Factor 5 **Genre**//Adventure **Players**//TBA
Website//www.factor5.com **Release date**//TBA

DEALING WITH *Lair* is a bit like going through the break-up of a long-term relationship, the first stage of which is denial. To be honest, we don't have high hopes for titles that pop up pretty much unexpectedly, and a fair way down the line to completion. It's difficult to accept the marketing hype and many of the early screenshots are equally unbelievable – you tend to get the feeling it has something to hide. You simply can't believe it's going to be a good game. Then comes justification. You begin to wonder why such a title is being made. What does it have to offer? You see the reason, but you still don't understand. Anger next, and while it's difficult to get that worked up about it, there's a definite sense of annoyance that there is so little about *Lair* that is in any way next gen.

Indeed, much of the footage we've seen displays some aspects – mixed with the intrigue of such a stylish and varied title – that seem a little naive for our liking. Finally you enter the acceptance stage. This is where things come full circle and we're pretty much back in our equilibrium place. This is where we are at the minute – finely balanced between hope and despair. And, depending on which direction developer Factor 5 goes with the time left to it, *Lair* could well end up as either the best or the worst of Playstation 3's early line-up. Let's hope for the former.

%complete

Contenders... are you ready?

Virtua Fighter 5

PS3 **Publisher**//Sega **Developer**//AM2 **Genre**//Fighter **Players**//1-2 **Website**//www.virtuafighter.jp **Release Date**//Spring 2007

WORKING FROM the most recent revision (revision A) of the now established (in Japan at least) arcade fighter *Virtua Fighter 5* you'd expect the latest in the long line of Sega's seminal beat-'em-up to be pretty much arcade perfect. In fact you'd have to bet that it would add a few little touches to elevate it above what the die-hard arcade goers will have been playing for months by the time Sega gives us access to the finished article. While you can guarantee an extra couple of modes on the home console version it looks like we may be suffering a little come the release date with the Tokyo Game Show exposing some worrying load time issues. Of course an extra four seconds of loading is not something likely to bother the majority, but it's the sort of thing that's bound to get the hardcore contingent's collective brows furrowed. That said, there's a lamentably long time until it hits our shelves, so hopefully there'll be plenty of optimisation time left in the schedule.

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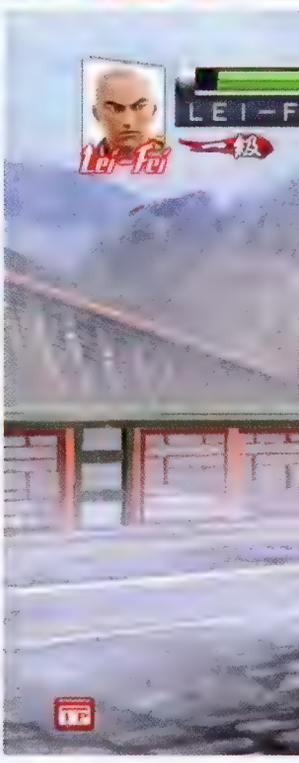
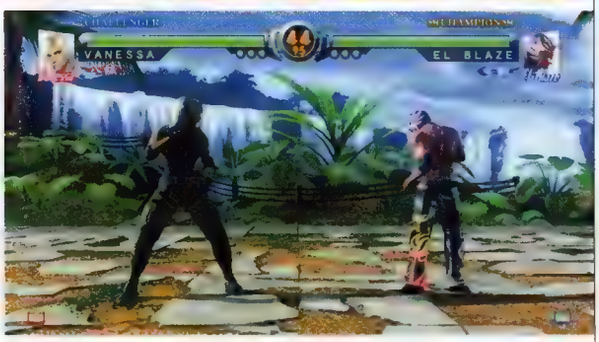


Easily the more hardcore fighting game on PS3, *Virtua Fighter 5* will take months to master.

New character El Blaze is a Mexican-style wrestler who combines speed with power.



Jones had the honor of designing and naming a character to feature in *Virtua Fighter 5*.

Earlier reports stated Ryu might not be the main character this time. Thankfully that's not true.

Itagaki kicks your arse again. Again

Ninja Gaiden Sigma

PS3 **Publisher**// Tecmo **Developer**// Team Ninja **Genre**// Action **Players**// 1
Website// http://www.tecmogames.com/ **Release date**// TBA 2007

TEAM NINJA leader Tomonobu Itagaki may be one of the most outspoken men in the industry, but he sure knows power. With most of his games, Itagaki has always supported the strongest platform available. Which is pretty much the reason *Ninja Gaiden Sigma* is for Playstation 3.

Sigma is the second remake of *Ninja Gaiden*, behind last year's *Black*. *Sigma* includes everything previous – as well as copious new content and an obvious facelift. Gameplay-specific changes see lead character Ryu dual-wielding swords, a second playable character in Rachel the demon hunter, new and extended locations, new boss fights, and all the FMVs now rendered in-engine. It's the best package for one of the greatest action games ever.

But there are concerns. *Ninja Gaiden* is one of the best looking Xbox games – but *Sigma* is stuck between amazing character models and animations, yet strangely previous gen locations. Itagaki and co will hopefully amend this before release, but it won't ruin the experience. Even in its third iteration it's a game that demands your purchase... and patience.

%complete

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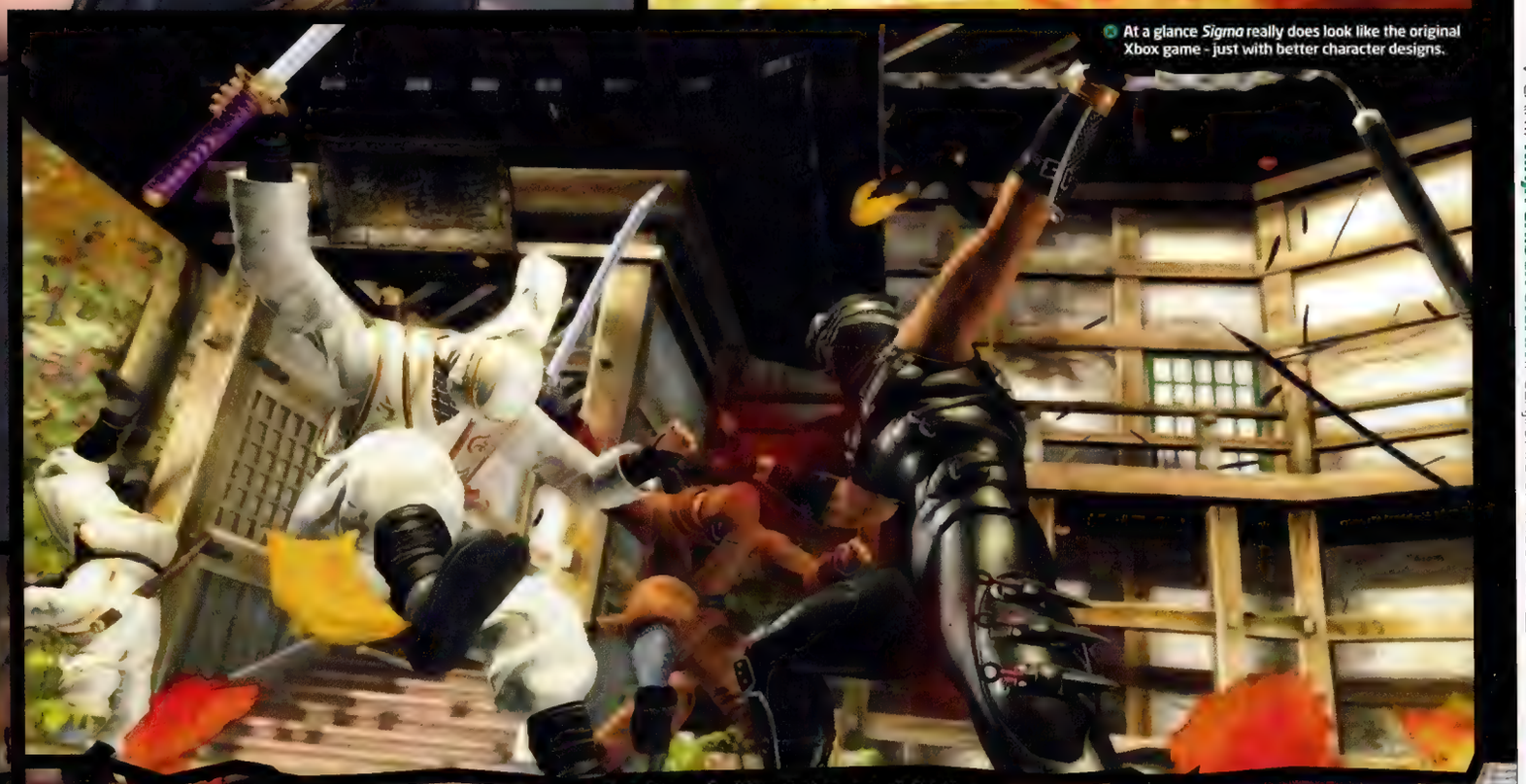
Rachel gets to wield her massive bow staff and sword in *Sigma*'s new gameplay sections.

Even in its third iteration it's a game that demands your purchase... and patience



At a glance *Sigma* really does look like the original Xbox game - just with better character designs.

Okay, so it might not look as good as it should. But it's still quite lovely isn't it?

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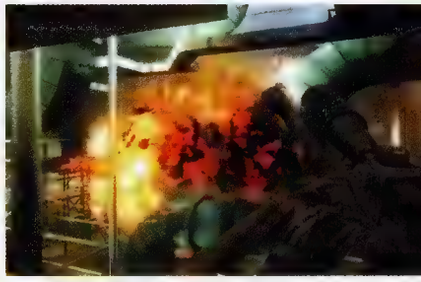
Coded Arms wasn't exactly well received on PSP. Here's hoping that a better control system will be implmented.

Fact: Japanese people are more likely to suffer motion sickness. FPSes don't sell well over there.



Rage Against The Machine

Coded Arms Assault

PS3 **Publisher**//Konami **Developer**// In-house **Genre**//FPS **Players**//1-16 **Website**//www.konami.com/codedarms **Release Date**//2007

JUST A quick FYI: Konami we don't recommend splicing early gameplay sections with glitzy trailer footage in your game demos – after the impressive explosions, cyber-chic effects and exciting environments the shuddering frame-rate and dubious visuals that follow can do nothing but rain on the über futuristic parade. After watching the latest *Coded Arms* trailer to escape Konami's master computer we were left a little concerned about the future of the sci-fi shooter, which was perhaps jumping the gun a little because after getting a quick hands-on with the code we came away with plenty of positives.

Taking the basic premise of its PSP predecessor, *Assault* takes place in a virtual world and tasks you with eliminating the cyber criminals and 'bugs' corrupting the system. Of course the inhabitants of this matrix-like metropolis aren't too welcoming and so make it their mission to target you and send you back to the 'real' world. This pleasingly simple scenario goes hand in hand with a unique sense of style – when disposing of enemies they disintegrate into pieces of numbered code and are wiped from the program. Enemies we encountered came in the form of standard grunts and more melee-centric brutes that charge you and engage in a spot of fisticuffs. Being inside a program obviously provides the opportunity to rebrand some of the traditional FPS elements, so your life becomes your 'connection' strength and armour is system 'protection'.

Despite being set in a virtual world the level on show has a real world look to it with plenty of Asian influences. The guns you get to wield are also fairly familiar, with pistols and assault rifles the only firepower provided, but the developer has promised many more potent toys to come. Powered by the Unreal Engine most of the game's elements look pretty solid but there is still a lot of optimising to be done here and of course the frame-rate is a concern – but with plenty of time before release the development team should be able to get the 'code' up to scratch.

%complete

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Konami we don't recommend splicing early gameplay sections with glitzy trailer footage in your game demos

We just can't enough of games that are all *Matrix*-y. They're really original and all that.

Blu movies

YOUR NEXT GENERATION MOVIE GUIDE BIBLE

Rating guide

ESSENTIAL	★★★★★
ROCKING	★★★★
GOOD	★★★
BARGAIN BIN	★★
BIN FODDER	★

SYRIANA

Understand the Middle East crisis in two-and-a-half easy hours!

ABOUT//

It's easy to be intimidated by *Syriana*, the themes of terrorism and corporate corruption are enough to scare off anyone who's unfamiliar with the situation in the Middle East. The structure of the film, flitting between plot strands with fierce intent, is equally uncompromising, meaning those with a distaste for anything remotely challenging should steer well clear.

Not that we advise you to do that. For all its density, which at times feels near-impenetrable, *Syriana* is a rewarding and mature film, leading the way for a new wave of political thrillers unafraid to match excitement with intelligence. And though the multi-stranded plot structure is beginning to feel tired, Gaghan handles it confidently, never lingering too long on one segment before he moves onto another. Indeed, there is something exciting, and for that matter refreshing, about the pace in which *Syriana* scurries through its story. Bar the odd torture scene and renegade missile explosion, the majority of the scenes involve men in suits nattering with or about men in robes, so much of the excitement is really in seeing the plot accelerate.

This is a very thorough moral and political investigation into the current Middle Eastern climate expertly sprinkled with moments of extreme drama, but that in itself wouldn't be enough to make it work as well something like *All The President's Men* or *Traffic*. In order for *Syriana* to have really lived up to its Oscar-laden hype, it needed strong performances the audience could connect with. Gratifyingly, it does, with George Clooney and Matt Damon on particularly stellar form as a scapegoated CIA agent and tragedy-struck energy analyst respctively. From these performances, *Syriana* gains a much-needed heart that starkly contrasts the film's cold indictment of an incurably corrupt industry. ★★★★

PICTURE QUALITY

Syriana's gritty look certainly helps the tone of the film, but it's a style that doesn't translate as well as you might hope to Blu-ray. Sure it worked for *Black Hawk Down*, but here, for whatever reason, it feels ever-so-slightly mucky, leaving you with the suspicion that there's still plenty of room for improvement. That said, there are some scenes set under the Middle Eastern sun that dazzle with crisp colour and fine detail, and demonstrate the still-impressive power of the HD disc like nothing else before it. Excellent stuff, but unfortunately not consistently so. ★★★★

BEST BD SCENE

The sun-soaked pool party that ends in tragedy.

Director// Richard Donner
Cast// Bruce Willis, Mos Def, David Morse
Price// $27.99

16 BLOCKS

John McClane with a moustache? No such luck.

ABOUT// In Richard Donner's *16 Blocks*, Willis again plays a downbeat member of the NYPD complete with frown and drink problems, but this is no *Die Hard*. Far from it.

The plot is fairly straightforward, with Willis having to escort an eye-witness from jail to a courthouse 16 blocks away. It then transpires that some corrupt cops want the witness dead, and only Bruce Willis stands in their way. It's done with that all too familiar grit but there is always going to be something quite cool about cops with a penchant for shady dealings. Well, just about anyway.

Though Mos Def's misjudged performance was widely criticised, his is not the worst performance in the movie – that honour belongs to Mr Willis. His portrayal of a drunk cop is terrible to point of funny, and with this at the film's core, nothing could have saved it, not even astounding action sequences. Not that there are any of them here. Instead, Donner opts for the pedestrian at every turn, leaving *16 Blocks* feeling like nothing more than a series of scenes rehashed from cancelled Seventies cop snows. ★★

PICTURE QUALITY

Think for a moment how excited you are would be about a high-definition version of The Very Worst Of *NYPD Blue* or The Best Of *Hollyoaks: After Dark* and you'll have an idea as to why we're so non-plussed by the satisfactory state of this transfer. Solid stuff throughout – it's just a shame we couldn't give a hoot if it was or not. ★★★★

BEST BD SCENE

All blend into one, but the bus stand-off is most memorable.

Director// Richard Donner **Cast**// Mel Gibson, Danny Glover, Gary Busey **Price**// $25.99

LETHAL WEAPON

Buddy cop flicks just don't come any better

ABOUT// It's easy to get carried away when reviewing the classics from your childhood and tag another star on, but ultimately you just have to look at yourself in the mirror and say "Well, it is only a buddy cop movie with some serious testosterone issues", It is damn hard though.

Last month with *Kiss Kiss Bang Bang* we saw Shane Black at his worst – self-indulgent, smug and aimless – but with *Lethal Weapon* the writer is at his best, sticking tightly to a well-trodden formula but enhancing it with tremendous wit, flair and invention.

Four movies on, it seems senseless us reminding you of the appeal Riggs and Murtaugh have as a detective duo, but we will anyway: Gibson's crazy-eyed Riggs and Glover's too-old-for-this-shit Murtaugh are as good a screen pairing as you're ever likely to see, and it's a testament to their quality that the film's thrill-a-minute plot takes a backseat to their banter. Oh screw it, we'll give it five. ★★★★★

PICTURE QUALITY

A great transfer like this one really cheers you up. So good is this high-def conversion of Donner's film that it actually looks like a new film that's set in the Eighties. It's terrific, it really is, and exactly the sort of release you dreamt of when BD was first announced. ★★★★★

BEST BD SCENE

The freeway shoot-out – genuinely tremendous stuff.

ABOUT// Was *Raiders Of The Lost Ark* really worth the countless rip-offs it spawned? Yes, of course it was, but that doesn't make it any less annoying when another carbon copy of an *Indiana Jones* flick comes along and tramples all over our otherwise enjoyable evening.

The latest to do so is this, *Sahara*, an African-set adventure yarn which, though not awful, is so hideously run of the mill you don't have to have seen it to see it, if you can fathom what exactly we mean. In Harrison Ford's place is the sometimes-charming McConaughey playing the role of Dirk Pitt, a dashing adventurer so smug you're constantly wishing for him to fall flat on his pearly whites. Joining him in his quest to win treasure and stop a plague is the stunning-but-boring Penelope Cruz playing a UN Scientist and the born-to-be-the-comic-relief Steve Zahn.

In truth, there's very little to hate about this film – there are some okay action sequences and the dialogue is plenty fun enough – but it's all been done before, and, crucially, so much better. It's such a shame when a studio can spend so much money on a film only to leave the audience asking 'what's the point?' ★★

Director//Breck Eisner **Cast**//Matthew McConaughey, Penelope Cruz, Steve Zahn
Price//$25.99

SAHARA

It's like Indy but without the quality

PICTURE QUALITY

Brilliant stuff actually. The African setting works really well with this nice clean transfer; the detail is pristine and though the colour is limited by the environment, it's strong enough to really impress. Hell, you even enjoy looking at the dirt on McConaughey's face. ★★★★★

BEST BD SCENE

The reconstruction of the plane into the land-sail-thing.

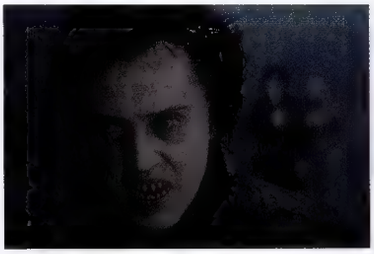
Director//Tim Burton **Cast**//Johnny Depp, Christina Ricci, Christopher Walken **Price**//$29.99

SLEEPY HOLLOW

What happens when Burton does an impression of himself

ABOUT// If ever there was such a thing as a typical Tim Burton movie, this would be it. The gothic plot surrounding a headless horseman returning to murder the townsfolk is perfect for that unmistakable Burton style, plus it stars Johnny Depp.

Perhaps because everything fits so well, *Sleepy Hollow* feels a bit by the numbers and you never feel as though Burton is ever stretching himself. There are frights to be had, sure, and Depp is as brilliant as ever as the bumbling sleuth trying to solve the mystery, but this is just too safe to be anything but likeable. ★★★



PICTURE QUALITY

The sleek blacks and cool greys are wonderfully transferred and made all the more stunning by the obvious advantages of high-definition. We doubt gothic horror has ever looked so good. ★★★★

BEST BD SCENE

The flashback to the horseman's gristly origin.

COMING SOON...

The Bridge On The River Kwai
1 A tremendous war movie with a cast to match

For A Few Dollars More
2 The second best spaghetti western on the best format.

First Blood
3 Excellent post-Nam action flick. Go Sly!

Reservoir Dogs
4 Tarantino's breakthrough movie comes to BD.

Total Recall
5 More sci-fi excellence from Paul Verhoeven.

Spider-Man
6 Sony's darling of the silverscreen comes to HD.

Desperado
7 Rodriguez's *El Mariachi*-inspired spectacular meets 1080p.

Batman Begins
8 This should be great on the next-gen disc.

The Matrix
9 You know it's the one we're all waiting for.

Unforgiven
10 Another Clint western takes advantage of BD.

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DVD round-up

Rating guide

ESSENTIAL ★★★★★
ROCKING ★★★★
GOOD ★★★
BARGAIN BIN ★★
BIN FODDER ★

Director// Various **Cast**// Kiefer Sutherland, Peter Weller, Ray Wise, Sean Astin **Price**// £49.99 **Out**// 11 November 2006

24 SEASON 5

The Jack Bauer Power Hour Returns for its best season yet

ABOUT// If cool moments were an aphrodisiac no one would ever want to experience sex again after watching Season 5 of *24*. It's that good. *24* has survived on the same pretext for five years: Los Angeles Counter Terrorism agent Jack Bauer (Sutherland) has *24* real-time hours to prevent an imminent terrorist threat any way he can.

By using the same concept through four consecutive seasons it's amazing the fifth managed to turn out even half as good as it is. But for its fifth season the creators came to realise what it is the fans crave: more Bauer being subordinate, more Bauer killing people, more Bauer rescuing hostages, more Bauer arguing with his daughter (Elisha Cuthbert), and – well – more Bauer. Period.

Season 5 has the benefit of a much higher mortality rate for its main cast, bigger action set pieces, several brilliant villains (including Bauer's very mentor himself: Robocop... sorry, Peter Weller), some genuine drama, much better pacing, more consistent episodes and a truly exceptional cliffhanger. For a show to kick this much arse in its fifth season means you're dealing with something truly special. The best season yet. ★★★★★

EXTRAS

Cast and crew commentaries on selected episodes, 46 deleted scenes (with optional commentary), several behind the scenes features on Season 5 casting and more. ★★★★

COMPETITION

COMPETITION ADDRESS
Competitions 04, Next 3 Magazine
Imagine Publishing, Richmond House, Richmond Hill, Bournemouth, Dorset
BH2 6EZ

FAMILY AFFAIRS

Family Guy Season 5 up for grabs

If you're a fan of *Family Guy* then Season 5 is a collection you can't do without - now thanks to Fox Home Entertainment you won't have to. We've been given ten boxsets to give away to lucky *Family Guy* devotees who can answer this question correctly:

Who provides the voice for Peter, Brian and Stewie Griffin?

A// Seth MacFarlane
B// Seth Green
C// Seth Johnson

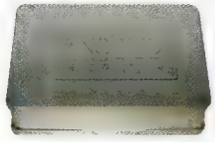
Winners will be drawn at random but don't be too disappointed if you're unsuccessful this time as you can get your own copy from 30 October when *Family Guy* Season 5 hits all good stores nationwide.

TERMS AND CONDITIONS

Employees of Imagine Publishing (including freelancers) and their relatives and any agents involved are ineligible to enter. Competition open to residents of the UK and ROI only. The closing date for the competition is 6 December 2006. The editor's decision is final. No correspondence will be entered into. The sponsors reserve the right to supply prizes of equivalent value rather than those illustrated. No cash alternatives. The winners will be picked at random from all the correct entries. The successful entrants will be notified after the 7 December 2006.

Price// £99.99 **Out**// 20 November 2006

NEON GENESIS EVANGELION: COMPLETE PLATINUM COLLECTION



ABOUT// The most inspirational anime ever is collected in a box containing all 8 volumes of the remastered Premium Editions. Eva (for short) is truly exceptional stuff, but it's not for children. Initial episodes may convince you otherwise but as it progresses the shift in tone is like jumping from Pokemon to porn. Mythologically and philosophically phantasmagorical, *Neon Genesis Evangelion* is nothing short of exceptional. Worth the price. ★★★★★

EXTRAS
★★★★

Price// £17.99 **Out**// 30 October

FAMILY GUY SEASON 5

More violence and sex on TV

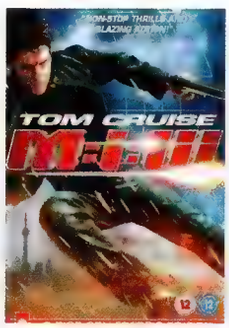
ABOUT// More the second half of Season Four than a season proper *Family Guy* is still the ultimate one stop shop for obscure references and twisted humour. This collection of episodes not only sees creator Seth MacFarlane pushing the envelope but throwing up on it with TV censorship, religion and morbid obesity (read fat chicks) all in the firing line. Fans of the show will know what to expect from this and with more airtime devoted to show stealers Peter, Stewie and Quagmire they certainly won't be disappointed. Add this to your DVD family right away. ★★★★★

EXTRAS
★★★

Price// £24.99 **Out**// 6 November 2006

MISSION IMPOSSIBLE 3 COLLECTOR'S ED

Easy-ish to ignore



ABOUT// *Mission Impossible 3* is a safe movie. In other words, it brings a certain level of excitement, a certain level of fun and a certain level of intrigue to the franchise without doing anything remotely new. It also has the best opening line to a film ever and is much better than *M:I-2*. A serviceable plot, sometimes exceptional action and Philip Seymour Hoffman in scene-stealing form – but we still prefer *M:I-1*. ★★★

EXTRAS
★★★

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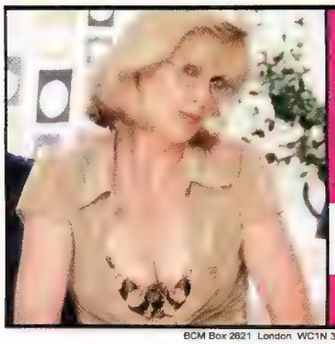

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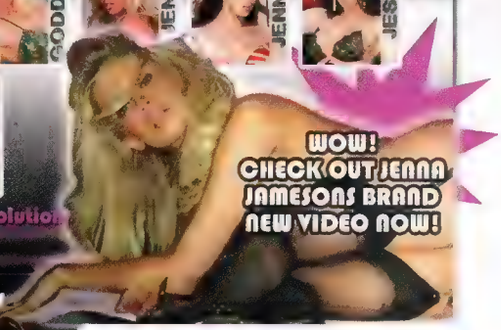

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Magic Moments
FINAL FANTASY
Remembering why PlayStation gaming is the best in the world

1

//Sephiroth Murders Aeris (FFVII) Of course this was going to be at the top. After spending hours getting to control Aeris, reviving her in battles, learning her best moves and abilities, watching her relationship with Cloud grow... she's brutally pierced through the spine while praying by the evil Sephiroth. One of the best scenes in game history.

2//The Spring Scene (FFX)
Final Fantasy X is chock full of some of the most beautiful FMVs we've seen – but none more so than this intimate meeting between Tidus and Yuna. It's made all the more affecting by the knowledge that Yuna is facing imminent sacrifice.

3//They have tails! (FFIX)
After the brief aesthetic detours in *Final Fantasy VII* and *VIII*, which saw vaguely human characters in the former and clearly human in the latter, *XI* took the series back to its over the top character design roots.

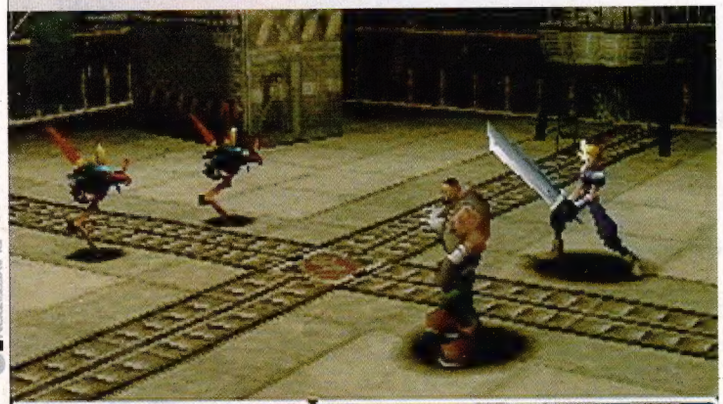
4//Western Combat (FFXII) It's yet to hit our shores but the combat in *Final Fantasy XII* will surely draw in bigger crowds than ever before. The random turn-based battles of old are now replaced with more traditional combat, letting you see your enemy before you even encounter them.

5//Rhinoa dances with Squall (FFVIII) Many fans of the series revere the opening FMV to the eighth *Final Fantasy*, thanks to its montage of gunblade fighting, but our favourite moment comes when Rhinoa grabs Squall and the two attempt to dance. How cute.

6//They can speak! (FFX)
Say what you will about the quality of the voice acting, *FFX* presented a great turning point for the series (as well as being fully 3D).

7//Final Fantasy VII on PS3 (FFVII)
Okay, so it wasn't an actual game per se – but seeing what arguably the best *Final Fantasy* could look like running on PS3 hardware surely whet the appetites of fans who still demand a remake.

8//Charlie's Angels: Full Fantasy (FFX-2)
The first ever sequel to a *Final Fantasy* game wasn't what surprised everyone: the fact the game was over-the-top, pop centric and the equivalent of *Charlie's Angels* in videogame form did.



9//Death Of The Black Mages (FFIX) This usually passes unnoticed in the series' best moments, but it's just as affecting as Aeris' death: loveable Vivi watches in horror as a cargo ship full of Black Mages are destroyed by a Waltz III, dozens falling to their deaths. Heartbreaking and unforgettable.

10//Jump to 3D (FFVII) It certainly looks crude today but the leap from 2D graphics on the SNES to 3D characters and fully 3D battle graphics on PSone was a definite turning point.

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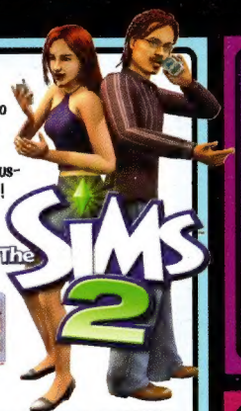

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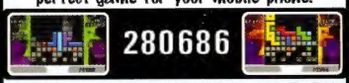

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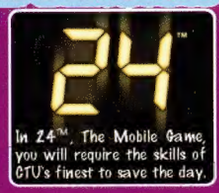

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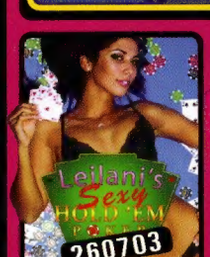

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